THE WAY OF A MAN WITH A MAID

BY CLARENCE E. MACARTNEY

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CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY

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FOREWORD

MAN'S relationship to woman is an elemental and inescapable fact, for "male and female created He them."

Woman is the rock where man anchors or is wrecked; man is the haven where woman rests or is sunk.

What has Christianity to say on this great subject? Never since God created man and woman has so much been said and written on this theme; and of all this, much is base, anti-Christian, and satanic. On every side we hear of companionate marriage, birth control, self-expression, free love, free divorce, and kindred practices. The world, the flesh, and the devil are having their say on the way of a man with a woman and the way of a woman with a man. Now let us hear what the Word of God, what the Church of Christ, has to say.

In these Sunday evening sermons, dealing with men and women, husbands and wives, lovers and sweethearts, men who protected or betrayed, women who tempted or inspired, as they pass before us on the stage of the Bible, I endeavor to state the unchanging conditions of happiness and honor between man and woman.

CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY.

From Gift

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I

ADAM AND EVE

"THE WOMAN THOU GAVEST ME"

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh. Genesis 2: 24.

I WAS not present at this, the first marriage, but I have been present at more weddings than any one here to-night, and not without observations and conclusions. The subject of marriage is one of universal interest. All, in a sense, are married; if not in fact, then in recollection or imagination. Some of those who are married in fact perhaps wish it were only in imagination; and some of those who are married in recollection are fortunate enough to wish that they were married again; but all of those who are married in imagination are happily married.

The past few years have witnessed a remarkable increase in the discussion of marriage and sex relations. No detail, physical or personal, has been too intimate for broadcasting and publication. This wide discussion and advice, theoretically, ought to have resulted in greater happiness and marital welfare. Apparently, this has not been so; and the free and general discussion of this whole subject

seems to have given an impetus in the direction of marital unrest and unhappiness and rupture. This may be so because the treatment of the subject has been almost entirely from one side and one viewpoint, a viewpoint which is anti-Christian, antimoral, antisocial. Hence the necessity of instruction and counsel from the side of Christianity.

At the outset we dismiss the preposterous idea that the one qualification for speaking on this subject is to have been married and to have had a large family. The true qualifications are threefold: First, a high moral purpose in speaking on the subject; second, knowledge of the Christian teaching on the subject; and third, an ability to observe and draw conclusions. A man might have as many wives as Solomon, and as many children as Methuselah, and yet have no qualifications to speak on this theme. If this were not so, then such teachers as Jesus, St. Paul, and John the Baptist would be ruled out of order.

I. DIVINE ORIGIN OF MARRIAGE

On many social questions, as such, our Lord was silent; but his teachings as to marriage is most explicit. The disciples asked him about divorce, whether it was lawful for every cause, or any cause. Instead of naming causes which were lawful, and those which were not, Jesus said: "Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a

man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh; wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh? What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." This last sentence, heard at the end of every marriage ceremony, is the declaration of Christ. The previous sentence is a quotation from the Book of Genesis.

The words of Christ carry his questioners, and us to-day, back to the Garden of Eden and the origin of man. Man, the prince of creation, made in the image of God, stands by himself in a perfect world. It has been the fancy of some thinkers that there was a fall before the recorded fall; that man in some way had lapsed from his original state before the creation of woman, and that as in heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage, so there was no provision for sex in man as first created. Thus woman would be God's afterthought, created to be man's helper, restorer, and redeemer. However that may have been—and there seems little in the Scriptures to warrant such an idea—God, having created man, created woman. He said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make an help-meet for him." Campbell in his "Pleasures of Hope" imagines man lonely and sad amid the pleasures of Paradise—

"Still slowly passed the melancholy day;
And still the stranger wist not where to stray.
The world was sad, the garden was a wild;
And man, the hermit, sighed till woman smiled."

What profound truths and mysteries lie back of these apparently simple narratives in the Book of Genesis. Nowhere is this more striking than in the case of the creation of woman. Some of the fancies of the allegorists are interesting and suggestive. They have dwelt much on the fact that woman was taken, not out of the head of man, to rule him, nor out of his feet to be his slave, but out of his side to be his companion and equal, and near his heart to be the object of his affection. When the Lord God had formed woman, then he brought her unto the man; and man beheld the last and most wonderful creation of the Almighty. There they stood in the strength of the primitive creation, in all the beauty and purity of unfallen manhood and womanhood, without sin and without shame, without alarm, fit type of the relationship between Christ and his Church.

"Hail, wedded love; mysterious law, true source
Of human offspring, soul propriety
In Paradise, of all things common else.

By Thee,—
Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure,
Relations dear and all the charities,
Of father, son, and brother, first were known.

Here love his golden shafts employs, here lights
His constant lamp and waves his purple wings."
("Paradise Lost," IV.)

Man was complete now in his equipment. Created in the image of God, perfect in his body, he had

dominion over the creatures; he had an occupation, to till the garden; he had companionship and a home. This first and original union was the divine foundation, Christ says, of the human family and the model for all that was to follow. Any departure from this standard was due to, or in view of, man's sin. When they asked him, "What, then, about the legislation of Moses, which permitted divorce?" Christ said, "This was permitted because of the hardness of men's hearts; but from the beginning it was not so."

II. INFERENCES TO BE DRAWN FROM THE ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN OF MARRIAGE IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS, AND CHRIST'S COMMENT THEREON

1. The twofold purpose of marriage is mutual companionship and happiness, and the propagation of the human race, upon which depends all human society and the Kingdom of God itself. These two purposes are declared in God's Word, "It is not good that the man should be alone," and in what He said to the man and the woman, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."

2. The marriage of one man and one woman, contrary to all other theories of social evolution, was the first and original relationship, and the plan of God allows of no other. This is not only revelation, but logic and common sense; for what could be more natural than that the race should have sprung from an original man and woman.

3. *There is no provision made for the dissolution*

of marriage in the form of divorce or in any other form. "Wherefore they are no more twain," Christ said, "but one flesh." To this union and relationship all other relationships, even the closest, are surrendered and become subordinate; "for this cause a man shall forsake his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife."

The moment we cut loose from Christ's teaching and God's original plan, and take expediency, or individual cases, as our guide, we are adrift, and at the mercy of the tides and winds of human passion and fancy.

4. There is no provision for sex relationship of men and women outside marriage, either before, during, or after. That such relationship is proper and desirable, is the most widely propagated social doctrine of our day. In the fall, the Tempter told the woman that the fruit of the forbidden tree would open her eyes and make her wise; and that it was both good for food and good for the mind. So the stream of books and pamphlets which occupy the front place in any bookstall are telling men and women to-day that this hitherto forbidden fruit is the fruit of enlightenment, liberation, and pure delight. But, as in the original trespass, which did open the eyes of the man and the woman, but opened them to "good lost and evil got," to take of this forbidden sex-fruit brings in its train not happiness, but misery. Nowhere since the creation have human relationships, other than according to the divine and

original plan, produced anything but unhappiness. The laws of God are given for man's good and perfection, and wherever violated they bring their entail of suffering. Prophylactics may save from physical disease, and contraceptives from children; but there is no prophylactic which saves the mind from contamination or the soul from tarnish, and no contraceptive which will prevent the conception of the children of regret, self-despising, and self-degradation.

A study of the marriages of two hundred men and women shows some interesting conclusions, among which are the following: The marriages of men and women without a college education were happier than those with a college education; but where the amount of formal education was equal in both partners, the average of happiness was high. Where one had a superior education and the other not, the average was low. Marriages of men with women older than themselves had a high average of happiness. But highest of all, those of women with men much older than themselves. Of the two hundred, thirty-six women and thirty-four men, asked if they could press a button and be unmarried would they do it, answered "Yes." The average of happiness in marriages where the wife had no allowance, no separate budget, or bank account, was much higher than in those cases where the modern plan prevailed. Last of all, and in demonstration of our proposition with which we are dealing—namely, that a sex relationship outside that of marriage is productive of un-

happiness rather than happiness—the study of these two hundred marriages showed that the happiest were those who had had no such relationship and the unhappiest those who had, either before or during marriage. This is only as we should have expected it to be; and thus the laboratory of the expert confirms the ancient teaching of God's Word.

5. In the original plan for marriage, as reaffirmed by Christ, there was no provision for any such thing as is suggested by the much repeated phrase to-day, birth control. The command was to be fruitful and multiply, and to replenish the earth; and with this high and holy purpose, a mutual companionship and affection, "for it is not good for man to be alone."

On this ill-favored topic there is much misunderstanding, and many are so misguided that they confuse it with the great Christian principle of continence and self-control, whether among the married or the unmarried. Many do not seem to see that the chief significance of birth control has to do, not with the established and regular marriage, but with irregular relationship. In the words of Walter Lippmann in his "Preface to Morals," the actual proposals go by a great variety of fancy names, such as free love, trial marriage, companionate marriage. When these proposals are examined, it is evident that they all take birth control as their major premise. The general plan is to take the stigma from such relationships, and in every case none of these relationships, free love, trial or companionate

marriage, is possible without the working factor of birth control. Those, therefore, who have an interest in the moral welfare of humanity will see in this movement only an effort to take away the one deterrent to promiscuous sex relationship—namely, the fear of pregnancy and of social stigma.

6. No provision was made in the original constitution of marriage for what is called trial or companionate marriage. "Companionate marriage, from the point of view of the law, is nothing but a roundabout way of saying that childless couples may be divorced by mutual consent. It is a proposal, if not to control, then at least to register publicly all sexual unions, the theory being that this public registration will abolish shame and furtiveness and give them a certain firmness."

No such idea can be traced in the original charter of marriage. It was not a trial marriage, although, as in every marriage since, both the man and the woman were on trial. Difficulties soon arose, and we find the man and the woman in mutual dispute and recrimination. But they were not invited or permitted to renounce their relationship simply because it had become difficult and unpleasant.

III. REASONS FOR FAILURE IN MARRIAGE

This is not difficult to state, for all the problems of marriage are personal problems and problems of character, and where there is failure it is due to the failure of one or both parties. Yet even this word

"failure" must be used in a relative meaning, for great and good men have been brought into the world by men and women who, in their personal marital relationship, were not happy. We make no mention now of disease, ignoble vice, and degeneracy, and the awful curse which this brings to a home. What we are trying to do is to get at some of the causes for the widespread and rapidly increasing unrest and discontent in the marriage relationship, as is evidenced by the fact that the divorce rate in the United States in 1926 was 154 per 100,000 population as against 79 in 1901, and 28 in 1870.

Among these causes we may state first the dissemination through books, and especially by the moving picture screen, of an unnatural, unwholesome sentimental relationship between man and woman; a sort of sex thrill altogether apart from the sober marriage, and even where it occurs, unable to carry the burdens of married life. People who are expecting that sort of thing in marriage had better quit before they commence. It creates an altogether false standard of marital happiness; and in this connection, it is worth noting that nowhere are there so many or such odious divorces as among the actors and actresses of the moving picture world.

Another chief reason for failure in marriage is a discontent with the limitations and burdens of marriage. Too many enter into this garden as if it were a garden of indulgence and exciting adventure, instead of a garden of labor, denial, and trial. The

limitations of the Garden of Eden tempted the man and the woman to revolt and so brought them grief and woe. Marriage is an invitation on the part of man and woman to one another to share the tragic experiences of life, experiences in which there are suffering, trial, and the shedding of blood. Weak creatures cry, "We are not happy," and rush off to the divorce courts. Who said we were made to be happy? What we do know is that we are made to toil, to labor, to take up the cross, and by our suffering to possess our souls in this "vale of soul-making." When married people discover that this is true of marriage, and even more so in marriage than in other relationships, then comes the test. The ecstatic, sentimental thrill has gone; but duty remains. Have the man and the woman the character to face duty? Often, looking into the face of the man and woman, and having them repeat after me the marriage vow, "I do covenant and promise before God and these witnesses to be thy loving and faithful husband—wife—in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live," I ask myself, "Do they have the manhood, the womanhood, the Christian faith to perform that vow? Are they able to drink the cup of marriage and to be baptized with its ofttimes deep and cold waters?"

Back of all these other causes and reasons is the lack of religious faith. This involves an intelligent acceptance of God's plan for marriage and a deter-

mination to be loyal to it. It was a fine old custom, that which used to prevail in Scotland, when on their marriage night the bride and the groom came together for family prayers and the husband read the first chapter of the book of Genesis.

It is a satisfaction to be able to say that the effect of religion upon happiness and honor in marriage is something not merely taught in the Word of God, but confirmed by experience. The study of the record of the Churches in connection with divorce shows this. In our own Presbyterian Church, for example, eighty-three per cent of the congregations which made a report show no divorces among those who were regular attendants upon divine worship; and ninety-two per cent reported one or less. This is what we might have expected; and it shows where men and women put themselves in any degree under the leadership and influence of the Church, it has a profound effect upon their life and conduct. The records show, too, that the preponderance of unhappy marriages is among those of no religious association, or irregular association.

The rock upon which to build and found a home is the Rock of Ages; and where men and women enter into this highest and most beautiful, most sacred, and most difficult of human relationships in the fear of God, and in loyalty to the teachings of Jesus Christ, they have the right to expect that happiness which springs out of the close companionship of a man and a woman who believe in God, respect their own souls

and the souls of their partners, and the high satisfaction of those who, by bringing children into the world and training them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, help to carry out the sublime plan of God when he said at the beginning, "Let us make man in our image."

II

RUTH AND BOAZ

IS MODESTY EXTINCT?

And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech. Ruth 2: 3.

THE book of Ruth is an oasis of human beauty in the midst of the wild waste of Old Testament history. It stands between the Book of Judges and the First Book of Samuel. "Now it came to pass in the days when the Judges ruled." The age of the Judges was one of iron and blood. It was a rough-and-tumble world in which men are a law unto themselves. Everything is on the heroic scale—mirth, sorrow, revenge, hate, murder, anger, and patriotism. Silhouetted against this dark background are strange and unforgettable characters who move across the stage to the music of strong passions. Shamgar, Gideon, Samson, Deborah, Jael, Jephthah, Jotham. After the storm and whirlwind of the Judges comes this still small voice, this beautiful pastoral idyl, the story of Ruth.

This is a story with a sad beginning and a happy ending. There was a famine in Israel, and Elimelech and his wife with the beautiful name, Naomi, migrated westward to Moab, hoping to better their fortunes.

But in this they were disappointed. Affliction and want and sickness overtook them. The two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, had married daughters of Moab, Orpah and Ruth. First the father died, then the two sons, and the three women were left to face the battle of life by themselves. Women have more endurance than men, and under any physical or mental strain the men will break first. It was so here. The three men died; the three women survived. Naomi had heard that the Lord had "visited his people in giving them bread." Her heart was still in the homeland at Bethlehem, and thitherward she set out, her daughters-in-law starting on the journey with her. The unselfish Naomi urged them to go back. But they both answered, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." Naomi explained to them that they would meet hardship and loneliness in the strange land, and that they could have no hope for husbands among the people of Israel. After this second appeal, one of the daughters, Orpah, kissed her mother-in-law and went back. She is not to be severely censured. She was a good woman, and evidently affectionate; but when it came to making the decision for a course which would be dangerous and hard, she lacked the resolution, and thus is a type of all those women, who have good dispositions and fair characters, yet cannot make the sacrifice and denial which are required for the highest life and devotion.

Seeing that Ruth still clave to her, Naomi un-

selfishly tells her to follow her sister-in-law and go back to her own people and her own gods. Then it was that Ruth broke out into the wonderful affirmation, which more than anything else makes her name immortal. "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, Naomi ceased to attempt to dissuade her. There comes a time and a place when one's election and resolution is declared so plainly and firmly that friends and enemies, men, angels, and devils all respect it. Peter saw that in Jesus, when he said to him, speaking of the predicted Passion, "Lord, this shall not be unto thee," and Jesus answered, "Get thee behind me, Satan." The friends of Luther saw it in his face when, after their warnings and expostulations, he said he would go to Worms, though there were as many devils as tiles on the roof. The friends of Paul at Cæsarea saw it in Paul's face and heard it ring in his voice when, in answer to their tearful entreaties that he should not risk his life by going up to Jerusalem, Paul said, "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Noth-

ing is more necessary for the Christian life than a steadfast mind and heart, a choice and election for Christ and Eternal Life from which we shall not be turned back by any failure in ourselves or in others, or by any danger or peril.

All literature abounds in love stories; but this is the only instance of a great love story about a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. Too often that relationship has been the theme of vulgar jest and jibe, but here in the Book of Ruth it is lifted into the heavenly places. What we hear from the lips of Naomi and Ruth is a credit to both. But it was more than her mother-in-law, and her mother-in-law's people and land, that Ruth chose. She chose Naomi's God. "Thy God shall be my God." This was all the more remarkable because it was evident that Naomi's God had permitted her to suffer affliction and want, and Naomi recognized this when she said: "It grieveth me for your sakes, that the hand of the Lord hath gone out against me." Nevertheless, Ruth was willing to choose the God of Naomi. Her years of close association with Naomi had commended to the daughter-in-law the mother-in-law's religion. That is always a fine thing, when intimate life with a friend commends one's religion and one's God. When the reluctant Darius sentenced Daniel to the lions' den, he said to him, "Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee." Thy God whom thou servest continually! What about your

God? Does your life commend him to the worship and adoration and love of others?

The crisis in Ruth's life was the decision which she made there on the banks of the Jordan. Probably in every life, could we understand its complete story, there is a parting of the ways, a time when what is said, or what is not said, what is chosen or what is rejected, what is permitted or what is refused, determines future destiny.

When they came back to Bethlehem and took up their abode in Naomi's half-ruined cottage, life must have seemed dark indeed to these two women. The rich have many friends to see them off and to see them back again, but the poor are not welcome because they bring a burden on some one else. When the neighbors heard that Naomi had returned, they gathered about her in front of her cottage, and when they saw her white hair, care-lined face, and bent frame, they exclaimed, "Is this Naomi!" Naomi made sure of her identity by her answer. "Call me not Naomi (pleasantness); but call me Marah (bitterness): for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." The fine thing about Naomi is that whatever happens to her of joy or of sorrow is of the Lord. Most of those whom she had known as a young bride in Bethlehem were gone. An old friend once told me that he went back to the village where his family had lived. The streets were there and the old houses, but the old friends were gone.

The only place he felt at home was where most of his friends now lay, the cemetery. In those lines that Lincoln liked to quote:

"The mossy marbles rest
On the lips that he has prest
In their bloom,
And the names he loved to hear
Have been carved, for many a year,
On the tomb."

"Call me not Naomi; call me Marah." Pleasantness and bitterness, sunlight and shade, day and night, achievement and failure, joy and sorrow, hope and disappointment, Naomi and Marah! So these two names follow you and me through this strange venture and pilgrimage which we call life. Happy are we in the Bible sense of happiness, if, when God calls us by either name, Naomi or Marah, pleasantness or bitterness, we can answer, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!"

Their friends could not support them, and no kinsman appeared to do his part. They could not dig. To beg they were ashamed. What could be done? It was the beginning of barley harvest, and Ruth courageously and unselfishly solved the problem by saying to Naomi, "Let me now go to the field and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace." False pride might have kept her at home; or she might have complained against the hard lot which friendship for Naomi brought her. Instead of that, the courageous maiden goes out to

glean after the reapers in the harvest field. There she had to associate with all sorts of people, the flotsam and the jetsam, the poor and the down and out, the dissipated and the ne'er-do-wells of the village community. It was a beautiful provision of the Old Testament law that when a man reaped his field, he should not wholly reap the corners of the field, and that what was left as the reapers and the gleaners worked their way down the fields should be given to the stranger and the poor. So we see Ruth following the reapers down the field, gathering up what they left behind them. Poets, painters, and musicians have all tried to catch and hold the beauty of that scene in the harvest fields of Bethlehem, Ruth among the gleaners. Keats in the "Ode to the Nightingale" imagines that the selfsame song of the nightingale had found a path—

> "Through the sad heart of Ruth,
> When sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn."

Hood, in his "Ruth," seems to sing both the ancient Ruth and a modern Ruth amid the cornfields of England. But whichever Ruth he meant, the opening stanza is an unsurpassed description of the Moabitish maiden amid the corn:

> "She stood breast-high amid the corn,
> Clasped by the golden light of the morn,
> Like the sweatheart of the sun,
> Who many a glowing kiss hath won."

"Now it was her hap to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech." It was her "hap." In the "Vicar of Wakefield" Goldsmith comments truly on these chances and happenings of life, when he says: "Nor can I go on without a reflection on those accidental meetings, which, though they happen every day, seldom excite our surprise, but upon some extraordinary occasion. To what a fortuitous concurrence do we owe every pleasure and convenience of our life." How the chain of destiny seems to be made up of what to us are chance events of happiness. It was the "hap" of the daughter of Pharaoh to go down the bank of the Nile to bathe just at the place where Moses lay crooning in his cradle of reeds. Had she gone down the bank fifty or a hundred yards farther up or down, humanly speaking, the history of the world would have been different. Columbus determined to quit Spain, and, discouraged about his plans for a voyage to unknown worlds, happened to stop on a sultry day at the gate of a Franciscan convent near Palos, and asked for a drink of water for himself and for his child. The prior of the convent happened by and began to talk with the stranger, and this chance meeting led to an interview with Ferdinand and Isabella. Ahasuerus was unable to sleep one night, and what he heard from the records read to him by his secretaries to divert his mind, how once Mordecai had saved him from a plot, led to the elevation of Mordecai and the saving of Israel

from annihilation. It all went back to a sleepless night. Homesick Ruth amid the alien corn, when there were so many fields about Bethlehem, happened to go into that field belonging to Boaz, who happened to be a kinsman of her mother-in-law's family, and this in turn led to her safeguarding, protection, marriage, and the birth of Obed, of whose line came David, and from the line of David, Jesus.

> "There is a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Roughhew them how we will."

The owner of this field, Boaz, was rich, single, honorable, and in every way admirable. As he came to see how the harvest was going, he was attracted by the strange maiden among the gleaners, and an admiring glance fell upon her. He asked his steward who this was, and when he told him that she was the daughter-in-law of Naomi, he at once took steps to protect her and guard her, telling her to stay in his field and abide by his maidens. There were rough characters in the harvest fields then as now, and a maiden's honor and virtue were lightly held. When Ruth expressed surprise and gratitude at the kindness and thoughtfulness of Boaz, he said, "A full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." When the noontime rest came, Boaz asked her to sit at his table and take refreshment with his reapers, and when the reapers went back to their work, Boaz called one of his young men aside and told him to

pull out some of the corn on purpose for her, as he went down the field, so that she would get more than just the ordinary gleanings. These and other touches show us that Boaz has discovered that he has a heart.

That night when Ruth went home, Naomi said to her, "Where hast thou gleaned to-day?" And when Ruth told her, "In the field of Boaz," Naomi was overjoyed, because she knew that Boaz was a kinsman. Hard times and heavy trials these two women had to face, as all who pass though life must do. But how much harder it would have been for both of them had they faced their common difficulties, as so many do, with bitterness, recrimination, or unfriendly feeling. The complete sympathy and understanding between these two women made their lot tolerable. So passed the days of the barley harvest. Each day Ruth had brought home her ephah of barley, and thus the wolf was kept from the door.

But what of the future? When we consider the plan and plot of Naomi, which, at this distance, seems to us dangerous and almost indelicate, we must regard it in the light of our knowledge of the character of Ruth and Naomi. There is no effort to trap Boaz, or to get him into a compromising situation, but only to make a straightforward, out-and-out appeal to him to do the part of a kinsman and a husband. What his feelings were toward Ruth were plainly evident, both to the maiden and to her discerning mother-in-law. The timid and diffi-

dent Boaz is to be stimulated into action by the appeal which Ruth makes to him.

It was midnight on the threshing floor, the open space where the grain was stored, and Boaz with the soft corn for his pillow sleeps beneath the stars. Feeling a movement at his feet, he awakens in alarm and sitting up he beholds to his amazement a woman at his feet, none other than Ruth. He cries out, "Who art thou?" and the voice, which by this time he had come to love to hear, answered, "I am Ruth, thy handmaid. Spread, therefore, thy skirt over me." The first answer of Boaz was one of natural and spontaneous thanksgiving both to God and to Ruth, that when there were so many others whom she might have followed or chosen, younger and gayer, he was the one to whom she had made her delicate and beautiful appeal. Glad to be asked, Boaz declares that he will do what she requests. He will spread his skirt over her—that is, he will marry her. But Boaz, even in a moment of his delight, thinks of a kinsman who is closer than he, and being a just man he feels that this kinsman must first be notified and be given his chance to play the kinsman's part. So he tells Ruth that if this other kinsman does not desire her, he will gladly go forward with the marriage. Then, with commendable care, both for her good name and his own reputation, he tells Ruth to leave the threshing floor before dawn, so that no one would know that a woman had come to the floor. In

the early morning, Ruth arose and went back to the cottage of Naomi.

Boaz notified the other kinsman, and, no doubt, was glad to hear that he did not propose to play the kinsman's part, but was willing to waive his right in behalf of Boaz. So they were married at the gate, and the people and the elders blessed the bride and groom, praying for Ruth that she would be like Rachel and Leah, who built the house of Israel, and for Boaz, that he would be famous in Bethlehem. In due time a son was born, and when the child was placed in the arms of Naomi the women said, "There is a son born to Naomi, and they called his name Obed." He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. The Holy Family is one of the most frequent among the studies of the great artists. Some day an artist will give us a painting of this first appearance, as it were, of the Holy Family—Ruth and Boaz and the ancestor of Jesus in the arms of Naomi, who, after all her vicissitudes and sorrows, now claims her name not Marah, bitterness, but Naomi, blessedness.

One hardly knows which of these three characters in the Book of Ruth—Naomi, Ruth, or Boaz—to admire the most. But the one all men love is Ruth. She had first of all that trait, or virtue, which is so much needed for the long, hard journey of life—courage. Whether the wife of Boaz or the wife of any other man, that the wife and the mother needs beyond all else—courage. She was no whiner, com-

plainer, but courageous, brave, enduring, the type of all those mothers, wives, sisters, friends, to whom men owe so much in life. Ruth had also what Peter calls "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." We hear no strident tones, and whenever she speaks,

> "Her voice is ever soft,
> Gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman."

She would not have been chosen on any antidry committee or birth control commission. She is womanly from the crown of her head to the sole of her feet. Whether the world has gained much by the introduction into public life of women is a debatable question. It is not so much a question of right, but a question of one's true place and sphere. The sphere of woman is not the same as the sphere of man, and that of man is not the same as the sphere of woman, but each has his own sphere and her own sphere.

To courage and a meek and quiet spirit, Ruth added the incomparable ornament of modesty. Her conduct in the harvest fields drew the attention of Boaz and won an admiration which matched his kindling affection. Had she been loud spoken, and free and easy with the young men and the reapers, Boaz would not have noticed her, or, if he had, only to blame. But she was girt about with a garment of that modesty, which is not only woman's beautiful decoration, but her chief protection amid the stain and poison of this fallen world.

To crown it all, was her faith in Israel's God. For that God she had given up kindred and native land, and it is not without significance that this is the kind of woman who stands as a link in the ancestral line of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Who in woman would want to find other qualities than that which appear in Ruth, and even across the centuries make her radiant yet as she stands amid the cornfields?

And there is Boaz. If to men Ruth is the incarnation of things desirable in woman, wife, and mother, then to women Boaz ought to be the type of things desirable in man, husband, and father. Here is a man who is just, and who, even although he loves this Moabitish damsel, will deny himself union with her, lest he should trespass on the right of some other. Fear any man who will do an unjust thing. Boaz is a man who cares for his good name and for the good name of his friends. He has Ruth leave the threshing floor lest her presence there should be misinterpreted and misunderstood. He who does not respect himself can have no true respect for others. In the harvest field Boaz is thoughtful and careful lest any stain or harm should come to the Moabitish damsel who has happened into his field. A good name is better than riches. Boaz was rich, but his character was more valuable to him than his riches. Here is a man who will not tempt another, and who in his relationship with this woman avoids the very appearance of evil. Boaz again was a thoughtful, considerate, and kind man. Perhaps it is easy to be

kind under those circumstances. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that thoughtfulness and kindness were inborn traits of this true nobleman of Bethlehem. This woman, he said, had come to trust under the wings of God, and yet he felt, too, that in the providence of God she had been brought to trust in his honor and in his care. Boaz was as religious as Ruth. All the steps which lead him forward to the happy issue at the gate are taken in faith and with the acknowledgment of God. If more women were like Ruth in courage, in constancy, in quiet, maidenly modesty, in resolution and decision, in faith and piety, and more men were like Boaz, just, chaste, honorable, kind, and believing, our world would be a far better world; and if, when men came to choose their wives, they would take Ruth for a model; and women, when they came to choose husbands, would take Boaz for a model, we should hear less of unhappy marriages, and homes wrecked and devastated by sin, selfishness, and passion.

III

ISAAC AND REBEKAH—JACOB AND RACHEL

LOVE, COURTSHIP, MARRIAGE

Wilt thou go with this man? Genesis 24: 58.
And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. Genesis 29: 20.

Sepulchers and marriage altars, burials and betrothals, how close together they come in life! The minister has hardly finished the words of committal, "Dust to dust, earth to earth, ashes to ashes," until he finds himself repeating to the man and the woman the vows of matrimony. So it has been from the beginning. Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of Machpelah, and then turned to the business of securing a wife for Isaac. A few pages are turned, and it is Isaac who is being buried and his son, Jacob, who is being married. So it has gone on from the beginning, and so it will go on until the world is lifted to that state where they neither marry nor are given in marriage.

We have here the two most celebrated stories of love, courtship, and marriage in the Old Testament. In the one instance, that of Rebekah and Isaac, marriage came first, and then courtship and love. In

the second instance, that of Jacob and Rachel, love and courtship came first, and marriage afterwards. But in both instances it was real love, real courtship, and true marriage.

Until time ends, the divine order is what God instituted from the beginning—that a man shall forsake his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Here in this fundamental fact is the foundation of law, order, human society, the Church, and the heavenly commonwealth. Without marriage, all of these are impossible; and they who follow this original institute are helping to carry out the plan and the will of God in the world.

I. Isaac and Rebekah

This relationship is honored and perpetuated in the marriage service of the Church of England, where the bride and the groom are exhorted to live together "as Isaac and Rebekah lived faithfully together." Sarah had been a model wife and mother to Abram and Isaac, and her death left a great gap in that family circle. Isaac was past forty and not yet married. The reason seems to have been, first of all, a natural and rather attractive diffidence and passiveness of disposition; and in the second place, an unusual bond of close affection between this son of the promise and his mother and father. Then there was the fact that they were dwelling in the land of Canaan, which, although the promised land, was a

land of idolaters, whose inhabitants, unless Abraham was willing to lower his standards, could supply no suitable candidates for the hand of Isaac.

MIXED MARRIAGES

When Abraham is old and well stricken in years, he takes thought for the continuity and succession of his line through Isaac, and plans for his marriage. Some would never take this step unless it were planned for them, and if all could plan as well as Abraham did, there could be little objection to such a manner of procedure. Abraham called his servant, no doubt the faithful Eleazer, who had been over his household for more than half a century, and charged him with an oath to go to Mesopotamia where Abraham's people lived, and secure a suitable wife for Isaac. He made him swear to two things; first, that he would not let Isaac take a wife of the people of the land of Canaan, who were idolaters; and second, that he would not let Isaac go back to Mesopotamia, for thence Abraham, faithful to the command of God, had migrated. Therefore, it would not do for his son, to whom the promise was continued, to return to Mesopotamia.

The care which Abraham gave to the marriage of Isaac is to be commended to fathers and mothers to-day. He charges the one who is to arrange for this marriage, that the woman chosen is to be of the same religion, the same race, and the same general family and social standing. Love imagines that it

can overleap the barriers of race and blood and religion, and in the enthusiasm and ecstasy of choice these obstacles and barriers appear insignificant. But the facts of experience are against such an idea. Mixed marriages are rarely happy. Observation and experience demonstrate that the marriage of a Gentile and a Jew, a Protestant and a Catholic, an American and a foreigner, has less chance of a happy result than a marriage where the man and the woman are of the same race and religion. Abraham insists that Isaac shall marry a believing woman, and this condition is one which every Christian contemplating marriage should consider. There are not a few who feel that the rite of Christian marriage should be celebrated only when *both* the man and the woman are acknowledged and professed disciples of Christ, and where they undertake to make their home a Christian home and to associate themselves with a Christian Church. There is something to be said for that position, for when one is not a professed Christian, the solemn vows made in Christ have little meaning and no binding power.

BY AN ANCIENT WELL

Now the scene shifts to far-off Mesopotamia. With ten camels laden with presents and supplies, the servant of Eleazer has reached the city of Nahor. Probably that city was just a collection of adobe huts, or scattered tents. But there was one refreshing place in it, and that was the ancient well outside

the city. These wells then, and even to-day, were the meeting place for the people, and thither the women gathered, not only to draw water, but to drink the water of social intercourse and companionship. Just at the time that the women are coming out to draw water, Eleazer reaches his destination, and makes his camels kneel down by the well. When he sees the women approaching, with their waterpots upon their shoulders, he asks God to direct him by a sign to the right choice of a wife for Isaac. It is to be noted that this was no insignificant sign; such as people sometimes ask for, a chance meeting, or a number in a series, or a certain color or form of an object, but one which carried with it an index to character. He would ask the first maiden who appeared to let down her pitcher and give him a drink of water, and if she responded to his request, and not only gave him water, but volunteered to draw water for his camels, then he would feel satisfied that this was the woman. The sign which he asked for was one which would indicate that the woman who thus responded had a heart of kindness, hospitality, and courtesy, always a pleasing thing in woman.

The prayer of the servant had hardly been finished when Rebekah came out with her pitcher upon her shoulder, "and the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin; and she went down to the well and filled her pitcher and came up." As she came up the steps at the mouth of the well, the servant hurried to meet her and said, "Let me, I pray thee, drink a

little water of thy pitcher." And Rebekah, with grace and courtesy, responded, "Drink, my lord," at the same time letting down her pitcher and drawing water for him. Then, when she had drawn for him, she volunteered to draw water for his camels. "The man, wondering," the narrative tells us, "held his peace," anxious to know whether the Lord had prospered his journey, and if this was to be the woman for Isaac. In silence he watches Rebekah as, with infinite grace in her lithe body and beautiful face, she bows herself to the task of drawing up the water for the thirsty camels, little thinking that at the same time she was weaving the threads of fate and destiny. So ever it is. When we are most self-conscious, our actions may be the least significant; and when we are acting as Rebekah did, spontaneously, naturally, without thought of the results or consequences, we are forging the links in the chain of our destiny.

"Whose daughter art thou?" the man said to Rebekah; and when he heard that she was the daughter of Bethuel and Nahor, and thus a niece of Abraham and a cousin of Isaac, he was overjoyed, and bowing himself down, worshiped God, saying: "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren."

We do not ask for signs just as this servant did, yet in the important steps of life and in marriage

above all else, because nothing affects one's life so much for better or worse, it is right that we should wait upon God and ask that He would make plain our path. This the servant of Abraham had done all through his long journey. "I *being in the way,*" he said, "the Lord led me." People who do not put themselves in the way, or who, in the way, get out of it and follow their own way, need not be surprised if their way leads them astray. With the upright, God has said, he will show himself upright; and with the froward he will show himself froward. If we stay in the way of his commandments, we have a right to expect his blessing and his leadership.

THE GREAT DECISION

Rebekah, with natural grace and hospitality, invites the servant of Abraham to come and lodge in her father's house. In the meantime, her brother, Laban, appears on the scene, not yet the hard-boiled Laban of Jacob's romance, but a man of true hospitality and brotherly interest and affection. The camels are unharnessed and given straw and provender for the night, while Eleazer and his companions go to the house of Rebekah. The table is spread with such things as were in the order of hospitality in those days; but this faithful servant knows the psychological moment; and says that he will not eat until he has stated his business. Then he rehearses the family history; the birth of Isaac, the death of Sarah, the charge which Abraham gave him,

the journey of five hundred miles over the sands, his prayer by the well, and the coming of Rebekah. He then asks point-blank whether or not there is hope for his proposition. If there is not, he will move on to some other collateral branch of Abraham's family. Laban and Bethuel both answered that the thing seems to be of the Lord, and that if Rebekah is willing to go to be the wife of Isaac, she can go. Then jewels and presents and decorations are brought out of the servant's treasury to deck the beautiful Rebekah and the members of her family.

When morning dawns over the desert—and what were the dreams of Rebekah that night?—the servant is anxious to depart. Laban and Bethuel suggest a wait of ten days; perhaps that Rebekah might make more elaborate preparation as to her bridal garments; or perhaps that she might search and know her own mind better. But the wise servant says that now is the accepted time, and insists upon an immediate departure. Then the father and brother turn to Rebekah and say those words which have echoed in the world ever since, and in the marriage service, "Wilt thou go with this man?" For her it meant an everlasting farewell to the town where she was born, to her girlhood friends, to the quiet evenings of chatter and gossip by the well; separation from father and mother, brother and sister, if she had any. There was silence for a moment, and then Rebekah made her answer, "I will go." She felt safe in going, because the whole subject and matter had

been advanced and proposed in the name of God. If the unseen bridegroom was of the same mind as this servant, then she was safe. And yet, after all, as in every such response, it had to be the answer of faith. Rebekah said, "I will go." How that answer has echoed upon the lips of thousands and thousands of the sisters of Rebekah! "Wilt thou go?" And back has come the answer, "I will go"—no doubt, to those who hear both sentences, earth's sweetest music. "I will go!" and she has gone, although it meant the crossing of broad seas, a hut in a land of savages, a rude frontier settlement, one room in the third story back, which must serve as bedroom, living room, and kitchen. "I will go!" although it has meant separation, loneliness, child-bearing, sickness, grief, sometimes disappointment, sorrow, and tragedy. Yet the world keeps on going because men ask, "Wilt thou go?" and women still answer with radiant eye and tremulous voice, "I will go."

MEDITATION AND THE SOUL

The camels are off again, this time on the great trail to the southwest and the land of Canaan. During those days and nights of travel, Rebekah had plenty of time to think about her journey and her prospective bridegroom. At length they came to the well of Lahai-roi. It was toward the evening-tide, and Isaac had gone out into the fields to meditate. It is then, in that mystic period between the passing of the day and the oncoming of the night,

that the mystery and stillness of the world invite thought and meditation. Meditation is the twilight of the soul, and it is at the eventide, when all nature whispers of the supernatural, and the temporal seems to reflect the eternal, that doors and windows are opened for us into the heavenly places. That was a promising thing about Isaac. He was not all on the surface. He had moments of introspection and meditation. Before a woman marries a man, it would be well to know whether or not he ever meditates; and the same holds true of a man before he marries a woman. On both sides, one ought to know whether with the other it is just a round of activities and pleasures and excitements and moving pictures and comic papers and cheap stories, or whether the soul of the man or the soul of the woman has twilight hours of meditation and of thought. Frivolity in one or both partners to a marriage is, as often as anything else, a source of weariness and distaste on one side or the other; for, as one has said, "A fly is as difficult to tame as a hyena."

The moment Rebekah discerned the form of the contemplating Isaac, with becoming humility and modesty, true to the customs of the East, she alighted from her camel and covered her beauties of face and form with the long veil which then, and even now, prevailed in the East. This veil was a token of modesty, and yet of confidence and intimacy, and has its survival in the veil which the bride wears at the weddings of our own day.

AND HE LOVED HER

It must have been an anxious and critical moment for both Rebekah and Isaac. Suppose that the as yet unknown bridegroom should prove repellent to Rebekah? Or what if the bride should be distasteful to Isaac? But this was one of those marriages made in heaven, and the confidence of both Rebekah and Isaac was rewarded by mutual admiration and affection. Isaac dismissed the servant after he had related his story. Her nurse and companion, who thus far had been her chaperon, retired from the black tent; the veil was lifted from her face, and the romance which commenced in Mesopotamia ended in true happiness and true affection. Isaac took her into his mother Sarah's tent, the place sacred to him because of that great mother's memories; "and she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." So, in keeping with the divine plan, how it is not good for the man to be alone, the solitary and mourning Isaac is comforted and companioned by this successor to his mother, who becomes his wife.

II. Jacob and Rachel

In the story of Jacob and Rachel, we have the way of a man with a maid which is more in keeping with the ideas of our day and generation. Not marriage, and then courtship and love, but love, courtship, and marriage. The marriage service says that Isaac and Rebekah lived faithfully together, and this

is a true record of their relationship. The eager, impulsive, affectionate, and daring nature of Rebekah was well adapted to the quiet, meditative, and retiring disposition of Isaac.

THE WRONG GIRL

But our last view of the home of Isaac and Rebekah is not an altogether pleasant one. Rebekah, in some strange way, had her strong affections diverted from a natural channel which took in both her sons, Esau and Jacob, to one which embraced Jacob alone. Her whole heart and soul were set on the preferment of Jacob. It is true that, at the birth of these twins, it was told Rebekah that the elder should serve the younger. Moreover, Esau, when he was forty years old, married a woman of the land of Canaan, which was a grief of mind unto Isaac, but especially to Rebekah; and all credit to her for that. She said: "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, what good shall my life do me?" And in that mother's lament and dread we hear the echo of many a mother's voice. Few men marry women who altogether satisfy either their mothers or their sisters, for woman judges woman by herself. It was more of a blow to Rebekah to have Esau take a wife of the daughters of Heth than it would be to a mother to-day to have a son marry out of his rank and class. The great promises of the future were linked with her offspring, and now that

Esau had apostatized, she is doubly anxious to keep Jacob from contamination and to see that he is properly married. The ill-favored plot which she invents and works out for the deception of Isaac, so that Jacob gets the blessing of the older son, must be considered in the light of this fact. It was not merely maternal ambition and pride, but religious hopes which animated her.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Having tricked his brother into selling the birthright, and then deceived his father into giving him the blessing which belonged to Esau, Jacob had to flee the country. The first memorable incident on the exile's journey was his wonderful dream at Bethel, when he saw a ladder set up on earth, the top of which reached to heaven, and down which and up which went the angels of God. Fortified by this vision, Jacob made his way to what was then the far East, Mesopotamia. One day, far in the distance, Jacob, the lonely fugitive, saw three white dots on the horizon. Being of shepherd folk, he knew that these white dots were three flocks of sheep, and that near the sheep there must be a well and a habitation of men. At this his courage revives, and quickening his step he arrives at the well, where the three flocks are resting, waiting to be watered. Jacob greets the shepherds as brethren, and he says, "Whence be ye?" They answer, "Of Haran are we." "Know ye Laban, the son of

Nahor?" Jacob asked; and they answered: "We know him. He is well; and behold, Rachel, his daughter, cometh with the sheep." Jacob turned and looked upon Rachel, and in that glance was contained the whole future history of Jacob and the people of Israel. The Bible, without any mawkishness or apology, frankly recognizes the power and influence of woman's beauty, and tells us in the case of both Rebekah and Rachel that they were fair to look upon. So fair was Rachel that with impulsive Jacob it was love at the first sight, and as we shall see, not only the first sight, but the second and the third, and on to the very end, until when, but a little way to Ephrath, where she had given him the second son, Rachel died and was buried, but never forgotten.

Jacob, inspired by his first glance, ran to the well, and, although it was something more than one man's job, because love had multiplied his powers, himself rolled away the great stone from the well and drew water for the flock of Rachel. That was a good start for Jacob. Chivalry and gallantry at the well won for Moses his bride. At this Mesopotamian well it helped Jacob to win the beautiful Rachel, and by many a well of life the chivalry which comes from the heart and expresses itself in kindness and in courtesy has commended man to woman. Too often this sort of chivalry does not long survive the bridal day, and withers under the hot sun of adversity and trial and sickness and daily contact of personalities. But in the case of Jacob, this beautiful chivalry endured to

the end, and even the memory of Rachel is sacred to Jacob. This strong man, Jacob, had in him much that was sensual and abominable, together with much that was spiritual and noble, and it was fortunate for him that his heart settled on a woman like Rachel.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

Jacob never did anything in a halfway fashion. He concluded this first act of their drama by kissing Rachel, and thus sealing their affection. Meanwhile, Rachel's father, Laban, came out and invited him into the house. He is not now the generous man whom we saw as a youth and as the brother of Rebekah. He makes a hard bargain with his nephew, Jacob, and practically sells his daughter, Rachel, to Jacob for seven years of hard labor. There was another sister, Leah, not so attractive as the well-favored Rachel, and Jacob had no leanings in that direction. But he was glad to sign an agreement to labor seven years for the hand of Rachel. That would seem a long time to the people of our day and generation, who so often marry in haste and repent at leisure. Long betrothals of this sort ill suit the habits and thoughts of the world to-day, and, perhaps as a rule, are not to be desired, although, indeed, they have one advantage—that they afford opportunity for a complete acquaintance and a manifestation of both desirable and not so desirable traits and characteristics.

The course of true love never runs smooth. This

saying is as true as it is ancient. Jacob found it to be so. Seven years must have seemed a dreadfully long time to him, and to Rachel, also, though, no doubt, living in the same encampment, they saw much of one another and took plenty of time to water the sheep at her father's well. Then comes the sentence, which makes this story immortal: "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days for the love he had to her." Ambition, greed, hate—all these will make the day a week, and the week a year. Love is the great reducer and diminisher. So the years passed, and passed as if they were days. This is the kind of love that hopeth all things and believeth all things and endureth all things; and those who have hardship, sickness, poverty, and yet with all this can carry a lantern of mutual love, are to be envied by those who have rank, station, talents, money, comforts; but no love or affection.

RETRIBUTION AND LOVE'S LABOR LOST

At length the seven years are over, and the nuptial day so long awaited has arrived. The ceremonies appropriate to the occasion have been finished. Rachel's nurse, like the nurse of Rebekah, conducts her, closely veiled, to the tent of Jacob and retires. The veil is unwound, and lo! it is the face, not of Rachel, but the ill-favored Leah. Jacob's scorn of Leah is easy to understand. What is not so easy to understand at first is the unprotesting manner in

which Jacob acquiesces in this disgraceful fraud. Why was this? It must have been the reaction of his own conscience, "Whatsoever evil thing a man doeth, that also shall he receive again." And Jacob was paid in his own coin. He had deceived his own father, and cheated his own brother. Now, in the tenderest and most sensitive area of his own life, he is cruelly deceived. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

We wonder that Jacob did not knock Laban down with his shepherd's staff, gather Rachel in his arms, put her on one of his camels, and elope westward. But the age of elopement had not yet come. So Jacob settled down to another term of service. It is not quite clear from the record whether he actually served another seven years for Rachel, or whether at the end of the week of nuptial celebrations over the marriage with Leah, he was married to Rachel, and then served another seven years. But whether married then or not, he did serve fourteen years for the hand of Rachel, and never regretted it. His was the love celebrated in the Song of Songs: "Many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it. If a man will give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be condemned."

HOPE DEFERRED

After the marriage, Rachel, whose cry was, "Give me a child or I die," had to wait for a child almost as long as Jacob had to wait for her. This singular

fact, not only in the case of Rachel, but in the case of almost every notable woman in the Scriptures, must have a deep significance. It was so in the case of Sarah; it was so in the case of the mother of Samson; it was so in the case of Hannah, the mother of Samuel; it was so in the case of Rebekah, and of the Shunammite woman; and of Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. What is the meaning of this reiterated record of disappointment and hope deferred? It must be nothing less than to teach us that God wants above all else in his children faith. Faith is life's best child. It also emphasizes the fact that life is a discipline and a probation, even life in its tenderest and most intimate relationships.

AND WITH THE MORN THOSE ANGEL FACES SMILE

But at length Rachel's period of waiting was over. First Joseph was born, and then, long after, when Jacob had returned to his own country, not far from Ephrath, the second son, Benjamin, was born. With this second son, Rachel gave her life and was buried. Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave. He could never forget that day, and long afterwards, when he was about to bless the sons of Joseph, the old man can remember the very spot where she died, and how far it was from Ephrath, for he says: "When I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan, in the way, when yet there was yet a little way to come to Ephrath; and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath." Ephrath was Bethlehem; and

where ages later another mother was to bring forth Jacob's mighty descendant, there Rachel's child was born.

The love of Jacob and his whole life henceforth centered in the two sons of Rachel. When he looked on the face of his youngest son, Benjamin, or when he saw Joseph's coat of many colors flashing in the sunlight, or, on a darker day, all torn and spotted with blood, when Joseph's cruel brothers held it up before his father, the one of whom Jacob was thinking was Rachel. When he came to die, Jacob said, "Few and evil have been my days." Life had been full of trouble and sorrow for Jacob. Yet his path had been lighted by the lamp of a wonderful affection, and to his dying day Jacob, in the reverie of age, was again a youth in far-off Mesopotamia. Again he saw the three flocks of sheep like snow on the face of the desert; and once again by the well he saw the face that was even more wonderful to him than the golden ladder which in his dream at Bethel he had seen let down from heaven.

IV

JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE

IN PRISON WITH HONOR; OR, TEMPTATION CONQUERED

How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? Genesis 39: 9.

The life of Joseph is the world's greatest story, in the Bible or out of it. It is a story which helps people of all ages, classes, and conditions, because it teaches the great lesson of trust in Providence, and that "there is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." But it is a story which makes a particular appeal to young men and young women, and especially to young men, for it illustrates in unforgettable colors, dreams, dungeons, diadems, and shows the place and power in a young man's life of ambition, perseverance, temptation, and how these help to work out destiny. All of life's lessons seem to be comprehended in the story of Joseph.

The story of Joseph is a continuation of the romance of Rachel. When Rachel died near Bethlehem, Jacob marked the spot with a pillar. Although he forgot to go and renew his vow at Bethel, it is not unlikely that Jacob frequently repaired to this pillar, where he remembered Rachel, and how the seven

years he toiled for her were like so many days, because of the love he bore to her. Jacob had ten other sons by Leah and the two handmaidens, but the tides of his heart flowed out in the direction of Benjamin and Joseph, because when he looked into their faces he saw Rachel once more, as she brought her flocks to water them at the well on that memorable day in Mesopotamia. The romance of Jacob and Rachel is all the more tender and beautiful, both before and after the death of Rachel, because Jacob was well past middle life when he fell in love with this dark-eyed daughter of the East.

Jacob ought to have been taught by his own bitter experience in his relationship with his mother, Rebekah, that it is a dangerous thing for a parent to show favoritism to a child. That had been the source of much of his own trouble and sorrow. But now Jacob repeats the blunder of Isaac and Rebekah, and gives Benjamin and Joseph, and, for some reason, especially Joseph, the major part of his affection. "Now Jacob loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colors." This coat of many colors proved to be a dangerous garment for Joseph; indeed, it almost became his winding sheet. When his brethren saw that Jacob loved Joseph more than all the others, and boasted that love by giving him a coat of many colors, they hated him.

There were other aggravations, too. Joseph was a sort of confidential reporter to Jacob on the con-

duct of his other sons, for it is said, "Joseph brought unto his father their evil report." To this was added the announcement of his dreams. Joseph did it in a simple and natural way, but it is easy to see what offense it must have given. In his dream Joseph saw his sheaf standing upright and the sheaves of his brethren doing obeisance unto him. To this was added one still more startling, how the sun and the moon and the eleven stars did obeisance to him. Evidently the eleven stars stood for his eleven brothers, and the whole dream was strikingly fulfilled. When he related the dream to Jacob, the doting old father pretended to rebuke him, and said: "What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren, indeed, come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" Yet, in his heart, the old man was greatly pleased, and "observed the saying."

It is noonday on the plains of Dothan. The sheep are resting in the shade, and the ten brothers of Joseph are gathered together by the black tent which they had pitched on the plain. Far off on the northern horizon, there appears a dash of bright color. The moment they see it, the brothers know what it is—the coat of many colors. Hate can see afar off, just as love can. The father of the prodigal saw him when he was yet a great way off. Here Joseph's brethren "saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them." "Now," they said one to another, "he is in our hands! This is our chance! We'll fix him

and his dreams forever!" The wise man was not exaggerating when he said that jealousy is as cruel as the grave, and the coals thereof are coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame. When gentle, affectionate, handsome, and lovable Joseph, suspecting no harm, appeared in their camp, they stripped him of his coat of many colors and were about to slay him. Reuben, however, not as hard-hearted as the others, suggested that they do not stain their hands with his blood, but cast him into a near-by pit. It was his plan, when he had a chance, to release Joseph. But after they had cast him into the pit, while Reuben was off looking after his flock, lo! an argosy of the desert, a caravan of Ishmaelites on the way down to Egypt, hove in sight. The brothers drew Joseph up out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, ten less than the price for which Jesus, of whom Joseph was a type, was sold by Judas. Joseph is bound and hoisted to the back of a camel. The Ishmaelite leader gives the word, and the caravan is soon lost to sight on the southern horizon. When Reuben returns and finds what they have done, feeling a sort of responsibility, he rends his clothes and cries out, "The child is not, and I, whither shall I go?" Nevertheless, he seems to have felt it necessary to join in the deceit which the other brothers practiced on Jacob, probably feeling that it was kinder to Jacob to let him think Joseph had been killed by a wild beast than to let him know that he had been sold into slavery in Egypt.

Jacob is sitting in front of his tent in the evening, when his sons return from Dothan with their flocks. One of the sons comes forward, and standing before the anxious Jacob, for he has already noted that Joseph is not with them, holds up the coat of many colors, all torn and stained with blood, and with brutal indifference, says: "This we have found. Know now whether it be thy son's coat or not." Poor Jacob knew only too well, and said: "It is my son's coat. An evil beast hath devoured him." Putting sackcloth and ashes upon his head, Jacob mourned for Joseph many days, and refused to be comforted. It was the old heartache which he had felt for Rachel when she died near Bethlehem, for he said, "I will go down into the grave mourning." "And thus his father wept for him." The old man, after a stormy youth and middle life, was counting on a serene old age. But how different it was to be! As in the history of any another's man's life, his troubles and trials commenced again in his children.

Now the scene shifts to far-off Egypt. In the city of the Pharaohs the slave market has opened for business. Here are captives and slaves, black and white, from all parts of the world; victims of misfortune in war, or, like Joseph, victims of hatred and jealousy. The captain of Pharaoh's guard is looking for a household slave. His attention is drawn to this handsome young slave with the friendly, appealing face, and he stops to examine him, learning that he is a Hebrew, and sold into captivity

by his brethren. Potiphar feels his muscles, pulls down his lips to look at his teeth, pushes back his head so he can look into his eyes, and, satisfied as to his physical condition and his general desirability, concludes the bargain and takes him off to his palace. Joseph was then in the early twenties; "and he was a goodly person and well favored." He had the beauty of his mother, only now with a masculine touch. Alas! for Joseph and his personal attractiveness, for this is to bring him near to the pit of hell.

In the palace of Potiphar, Joseph, instead of moping, repining, or rebelling, put himself out to please and to make himself the best slave that his master had. He succeeded; and in a short time was put over the whole household and looked after all his master's business. "And the Lord was with him."

Egypt, even then, was a synonym for sensuality and corruption. The wife of Potiphar, who had marked Joseph with an evil eye, was probably already fallen and degraded. The devil, having tempted Joseph by adversity, and failed to break his spirit, now tempts him in the flesh. Sooner or later, every man must meet this temptation, and all his future depends upon that meeting—all the endowments of genius and character, all the fruits of industry and toil, all the silver of talent or the gold of genius. The most natural of temptations, this is nevertheless the strongest and most dangerous. Where the man yields, then farewell to tranquillity, to peace of mind, to greatness, and to honor. Where the temptation

is conquered, there invisible hands begin to forge a chain of gold to hang about the victor's neck.

In nearly every modern story, the order is reversed, and man appears as the tempter. In many of the ancient stories, however, it is the other order which prevails, and no doubt each is a true representation of human nature. Temptation is dangerous enough when it comes from within the man, urging him on to the gratification of his appetites. But how terrible it is when, as in the case of Joseph, it is thrust upon him from without. Woman is always greater or worse than man, either his angel or his demon. She lifts him to the higher places, or brings him down to the depths, and has the power in herself to rise to higher places than man, or to sink into depths more abysmal. As her sense of shame is naturally stronger, when woman appears as a deliberate and persistent tempter, she reveals herself in depths of appalling degradation, the most dangerous foe which the devil can use in his warfare upon the soul. Now let heaven and earth and hell behold Joseph in this most dangerous and terrible of temptations.

The temptation was unusually strong, first of all because of its source. The tempter was no common person or street walker, but a woman of rank, beauty, and fashion. It was strong because of its appeal, for Joseph was not made of wood or stone; was youthful, impulsive, generous, and fair to look upon. It had on its side, also, the immeasurable power and

influence of the fascination of the mysterious. To agree would be to please, and this was what Joseph always tried to do. A false chivalry, as much as evil passion, tells the story of many a wrecked and ruined life.

From considerations of policy, as well as from the pleasure of natural appetite, this temptation seemed to open up a way of advancement, and would give Joseph a powerful friend at court; whereas to refuse would be to render himself the victim of hatred, lose his position and perhaps his life. The temptation had unusual strength because it was a repeated temptation. Some will stand at the first assault, the very shock of the proposition saving them from ruin, but go down into defeat at a second, or a third, or a tenth temptation. Here the tempter's daily solicitation added terribly to the power of the temptation. When Jesus had rejected the overtures of the devil for the third time, and said to him, "Get thee behind me, Satan," then the devil leaveth him for a season. What was true in the history of Christ was true in the history of Joseph, and every other young man. The devil, who came one day to tempt him, left him only to return another.

We must remember, too, that Joseph was far from home, that what he was asked to do was a common practice among slaves. He was an exile; had been sold into slavery; would probably never see his father's house again; the world held nothing for him; his principles had not saved him from disaster

and slavery. Now, why not let them go, and taste at least a moment's pleasure? Thus, all conspired to make the temptation of Joseph as terrible as could be imagined.

Joseph had no voices to speak to him and no visions, like Abraham and Jacob. But he knew and recognized the moral facts of life. How was it that in this battle, where the odds seemed to be all against him, Joseph emerged the victor? We may say that it was the deep sense and feeling that what he was asked to do was a sin against his fellow man, a sin against himself, and, most of all, a sin against God. Every act of this sort is always a sin against some other person, against one's self, and against God. In answer to the proposal of this wicked woman, Joseph said that he could not do such a thing without violating the confidence which his master had put in him, for he had intrusted to him all his matters. Therefore, to do what was proposed would be to show himself an ingrate and a traitor.

If Joseph knew that the thing would be a wrong against Potiphar, he also knew that it would be a wrong against himself. Joseph, like every young man, had his dreams of future greatness; and to every young man who has such dreams, and who has seen before him an honorable place and station in life, whenever he is tempted as Joseph was tempted, there must come that indefinable sense of danger, of self-treachery, and that to yield to the temptation will be to wrong himself in that which is most

sacred and honorable. So Joseph felt that he would be a traitor, not only to Potiphar, but to himself.

> "To thine own self be true,
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Those were great and guarding considerations—the thought that, if he yielded, he would be wronging Potiphar and wronging himself. But without the third consideration, under the repeated assaults of temptation, Joseph would have fallen. Jacob and Rachel had taught him enough of God so that he had taken that faith with him down into Egypt. Jacob was by no means an exemplary man, and yet he had taught his son to fear God. Now we see the value of that training, for in his dire extremity Joseph cried out, "How can I do this great evil, and sin against God?" It is easy to imagine the taunts and mockery of this inflamed woman—and every young man hates to be taunted as to his dash and courage, especially by a woman. An old drama on Joseph represents Potiphar's wife, when Joseph said, "How can I do this great evil and sin against God?" as taking her skirt and throwing it over the image of an Egyptian deity in the room. But Joseph tells her that his God is able to see. "Thou God seest me." It was that sense of the presence of God that kept Joseph from sin. Other considerations might have failed. One by one, in the fearful storm which was breaking over Joseph, other anchors might have

dragged. But the anchor of the fear of God which Joseph had cast overboard gripped the bottom of the sea; laid hold on things immovable and Joseph was safe. Woe to the man or the woman who walks through life unguarded by the fear of God. No scientific treatise, no counsels of friends, and not even the prayers of a godly father or mother, are a substitute for the fear of God, and a dread to do that which is sinful.

Joseph's thought of God, and what this act would be toward God, had its effect upon him; but it had no effect whatever upon the masterful and passion-driven wife of Potiphar. At length, the crisis comes. At the end of many days' temptation the last effort is made. Will Joseph stand? This time Joseph does not remonstrate, or argue, or plead, but flees out of the house, leaving his garment behind him, but not his honor or his conscience.

The only safety now for Joseph was in flight; to get himself out and away from the dangerous poisonous atmosphere and relationship. So he bursts out of the room and out of the house. His name, his bodily welfare, his very life in danger, but his soul unstained. There comes a time when flight, distance, separation are the only means of safety. It is idle to pray and talk against temptation, and then deliberately seek out the path where temptation walks. It is foolish for any young man or young woman to pray, "Lead me not into temptation," and then read

a book, or go to a show which, unless you are a piece of iron or wood, can have no other effect than to excite imaginations and stir the bottomless pit of sensual desires. To-night therefore, before to-morrow—for to-morrow may be too late—for some one this is the message, "Flee for thy life!" Do not be ashamed to flee. Be ashamed only to sin.

> "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
> Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned."

The garment which Joseph had left behind him, and which was the real proof of his innocence, now is used to incriminate and convict him. For the noblest act of his life, Joseph goes to prison. The keenest suffering which the soul of man can experience is that which comes out of being falsely charged with moral iniquity and credited with base deeds of which he is innocent. That misery, Joseph now knew. In the words of the psalmist, "The iron entered into his soul."

What a night that first night in prison must have seemed to Joseph. Did he say to himself, "Where is God, when in this world virtue has brought me to the pit and to the dungeon, when vice and sin would have exalted me and brought me to honor? Where now is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob? Have I played the fool? and would it have been better to have yielded and done what this wicked woman wanted me to do? I feared to sin against God; but

God has let me come into the dungeon." "But the Lord," we are told, "was with Joseph," as he will be with all those who are faithful to him and who choose disaster, shame, prison, death itself, rather than sin.

The elevation of Joseph and the hanging of the golden chain about his neck came later. But even then, on that first night in the dungeon, although Joseph knew it not, unseen hands were forging the links of the chain of honor which one day he will wear. He had lost his coat of many colors stripped from him by his brothers, and the coat which Potiphar had given him he left in the hands of Potiphar's wife, only to be used against him to prove his wickedness and infidelity. But now Joseph is to have another coat. The angels of heaven are weaving it for him. And what a coat it is! Through its fabric there runs the red strand of sacrifice, the blue of honor, the purple of the favor of God and man, and the gold of fadeless glory. Put it on, Joseph, and wear it forever! Wear it, so that, even as thy cruel brothers saw the coat of many colors flaming afar off on the plains of Dothan, thy brethren to-day, young men of thy age, of thy temptations, of thy grace and charm, may see it afar off and be helped and warned thereby! Walk in thy wondrous robe down the aisles of our Church this night, Joseph, and display that coat which the angels made for thee in prison! Show it to our young men on the streets of the city, in its offices, in the theaters, in dance halls, telling them

that one day they, too, will find themselves in Potiphar's house, and that temptation as cruel and persistent as that which assailed thee will assail them! Show them, Joseph, the everlasting tragedy if they yield; the loss of self-respect, the dimming of the lantern of high ambition; and when they come to know the true love which can never be discovered in the mere expression of love, to have the ghastly knowledge that they cannot present to their bride a body unstained and unscarred by the darkest sin! Display thy robe, Joseph, and warn all tempted of the fate of the fallen; and all tempters and temptresses, that sad as is the fate of those whom they have tempted to sin, more terrible is the fate of those who tempt, and how it were better for them that a millstone were hung about their neck and they were cast into the depths of the sea! Point to thy angel-wrought robe, Joseph, and show what it means to have a God whose fear keeps from sin and who will go down with them into the dungeon! Wave thy garment, Joseph, as one would wave the danger signal, and tell some to flee, even as thou didst flee before Potiphar's wife; to flee now, to-night, for to-morrow will be too late! Stand in thy wondrous robe, Joseph, in thy exile, slavery, imprisonment, in thy beautiful and forgiving nature and thy temptations put under thy feet, a type of Jesus Christ, before the multitudes of young men and young women; stand before them, Joseph; display thy robe, and show them how God will never

forsake those who never forsake him, and that no man can ever hurt himself save the man himself, and that although vice may be attended with temporary felicity, purity is attended with eternal good, and that better is it to go prison with God than to stand in the palace with sin.

V

ABIGAIL AND NABAL

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

And she was a woman of good understanding and of a beautiful countenance; but the man was evil and churlish; and he was of the house of Caleb. 1 Samuel 25: 3.

It was a great and gala day in the hill country of Maon, which is near to Carmel. From all parts of Carmel the inhabitants were gathered for the marriage festivities of Nabal and Abigail. It was no ordinary affair, for Nabal was a great and wealthy man, and Abigail was a famous beauty. The oxen, the fatlings, and the sheep have been killed. Flagons of wine were emptied, and gifts were bestowed on all who came. There was music of every kind, from the plaintive shepherd's pipe to the sackbut, the dulcimer, and the harp. Had we mingled in the throng attendant upon the marriage ceremonies, we might have heard some interesting comments. "He must have a pile of money, this Nabal. They tell me he has three thousand sheep and one thousand goats, and his lands stretch all the way from the mountains to the Jordan. He comes straight down, too, from Caleb, the companion of Joshua in spying out the land, when our forefathers came up out of Egypt." "Yes, and

did you ever see such a bride?" answers another. "Among the daughters of women, there is none so fair. Her hair is as a flock of goats, and her teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn. Her lips are like a thread of scarlet, and her temples like a piece of pomegranate. Her neck is like a tower of ivory. Her eyes are like the fishpools of Heshbon. Her head is like Carmel itself. She is fortunate to get such a rich man for a husband, and to fall in with such a vast estate." "Yes," answers one thoughtful woman, "but perhaps not so fortunate, after all. Nabal is an aristocrat, wealthy, and powerful; but at the same time he is just an ordinary sot, sour, ugly, bad-tempered, profane. You may think Abigail is fortunate; but I am sorry for her."

The sounds of revelry now have died away. The crowds of peasants have departed, and the friends of the bridegroom have gone home. The sun has gone down behind the hills toward the sea, the stars have come out, and night, silent, beautiful, and mysterious, takes up her reign. Shadows fall over the palace of Nabal, whither he has taken his lovely bride.

Alas for Abigail! Thy fair dreams have been wrecked in the dread reality. The darkness pales into light; the stars strike their shining tents and depart; the sun, as glorious as ever, rises over the hills of Moab, coming out of his chamber like a bridegroom and rejoicing as a strong man about to run his race. In the nuptial chamber, Abigail turns to look for a moment at the heavy, sodden, brutal face

of the man who is now her husband, not rejoicing as a strong man to run his race, nor coming out of his chamber like a bridegroom, but dull, heavy, inert, drunken. Then, wearily, Abigail turns her face toward the casement through which the morning light is streaming. "I have married a beast!" The beauty and the beast!

Abigail was not the only woman so to awaken. That tragedy has been repeated over and over again in the strange history of mankind. Fair, intelligent, believing women, by some strange turn of misfortune have found themselves married to disagreeable, good-for-nothing, drunken sots. Here is one of life's heaviest problems. Marriage, which was founded for mutual help and affection, has been changed and degraded and distorted until it becomes an ever-flowing fountain of misery and sorrow and death. The Bible is always true to life. But did it tell us of happy marriages only, it would not be true to life. But it tells us of both happy and unhappy marriages. From the romantic atmosphere of the beautiful affection between Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel, we turn to this tragedy on the hills of Maon. And that tragedy is ever being repeated. Highly gifted, fair personalities, enduring slow martyrdom because, like Abigail, they have been joined to a son of Belial, and disappointed in the highest expectations of life. It would not be true to life, did we limit the source of this unhappiness to unworthy husbands like Nabal, for the tragedy is sometimes

just as deep and dark on the other side. But more frequently it is what we see in this picture of ancient Israel.

Abigail, so far as we can tell from the narrative, did not even have the consolation which God sometimes grants to women enduring such a martyrdom—a child, to whom she could give the affection of her heart, and from whom she could receive the love for which she had hoped in vain from her husband. Long, sad, and lonely days those must have been for Abigail, left alone by her husband; in a way glad to be forgotten by him, and yet sad, too. Yet her heart was not soured nor her life embittered by this tragic disappointment. Her marriage had become her prison and her marriage garment almost her shroud.

Now the scene shifts from Maon to the hill country toward the south. In this desolate and forbidding valley there is a hold for a roaming army of freebooters and adventurers. On the outskirts of their camp, sheep and goats are grazing. On the highest rocks, sentinels are posted, as if they dreaded a surprise attack by an enemy. In the camp men are furbishing their weapons, the spear and the sword, refitting their slings, cooking their suppers, and some of them strumming the harp and the dulcimer. Here under this oak tree we hear sweet music on the harp. The player at length puts by his instrument, and when he turns about to walk toward his men, he displays a rugged, manly form. He is

of moderate stature. His hair is reddish, his countenance fair, his muscles supple, and his face full of personality and attractiveness. Who is it? It is the face of him who, in some respects, is the most interesting and fascinating personality of all history, secular or profane, David, the son of Jesse, the sweet singer of Israel. David, by the call of God and the anointing of Samuel, was king of Israel. But not yet had he come to the throne, for Saul was hunting him with a maniacal hatred and violence. The six hundred men taking refuge in this stronghold constitute David's army, every one of them, although youthful, a tried and seasoned campaigner, and every one heart and soul for David.

They have had some hard marching in the past weeks, and their provisions are low. David learns that Nabal, the great landowner of Carmel, is shearing his sheep. It was a law of the wilderness that at such a time the landlord and the master gave gifts unto men. As anointed king, David might have made a requisition upon Nabal for supplies. But instead of that, he merely makes a courteous suggestion to Nabal, sending ten of his chosen young men to greet Nabal and salute him with peace. They are to tell him how they have not molested his shepherds or his sheep, but have guarded them from raiding Bedouins and have been a wall unto them by night and by day. "Wherefore," David says, "let the young men find favor in thine eyes, for we come in a good day. Give,

I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thy hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David."

Nabal was probably drunk when these messengers of David appeared; but, drunk or sober, what he said in answer to the message of David showed at once his inherent and elemental churlishness and rudeness. Every sentence and almost every word was an insult. Nothing is more irritating or insulting than to pretend never to have heard of one whom a man knows well. This is what Nabal did on this occasion. Everybody had heard of David, the anointed king of Israel. But Nabal answered, "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? What do I know about him? There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master." This was equivalent to saying that David was a sort of runaway slave. "Do you think," says Nabal, "that I'm going to take my bread and my water and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers and give it to a lot of fugitive slaves?" Thus Nabal showed himself as a type of that man who owes no social obligations; who will not confess that he is in any way his brother's keeper, and who believes, or pretends to believe, that if anyone is in want, it must be due to his own shiftlessness, laziness, and transgressions and crimes. Notice the emphasis upon the my: *My* bread, *my* water, *my* flesh, *my* shearers. Nabal might have sat for the portrait of the rich fool of Christ's parable. He is just as large as a coffin—room for himself and no one else.

The inspired apostle once wrote that the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; it defileth the whole body and setteth on fire the whole course of nature and is set on fire of hell. In this stinging, insulting speech of Nabal, we see the tongue as a fire, a world of iniquity, and setting on fire the whole course of nature. Some people have what we call a bad tongue, and seem to say easily and naturally things that wound and sting and rankle. But the disease is deeper down than the tongue. It is a disease of the heart.

This answer, reported to David in his hold, roused him to a pitch of fury. David was not often angry, but when he was his anger was oceanic in its rage and sweep. "Gird ye on every man his sword!" was David's grim command. In a few minutes, this army, always ready to move, was on the march, four hundred strong, for the palace of Nabal. David, just before this, and again just after this incident, had showed marvelous self-restraint and magnanimity in conquering himself and refusing to take advantage of an opportunity to wreak his vengeance upon Saul, who was hunting him with such insane fury and madness. But now, under the stab of Nabal's insult, he loses all control of himself and swears himself to a wholesale massacre. Not only the guilty man, Nabal himself, but every man of his tribe and family are to be slaughtered. It is not wise to answer a fool according to his folly, and there is an old saying that it is wise not to put to sea in a storm. But this

is just what David was doing; he was putting out to sea in a storm of anger and passion. All through the night these four hundred picked men are marching over the mountain trails toward the palace of Nabal. David, riding at their head, is silent, and a terrible look is in his eye. The storm clouds hang low about his handsome face.

Meanwhile, one of Nabal's young men has come to tell Abigail what had happened; how Nabal had insulted the messengers, and how vengeance and retribution, which might carry them all down in its flood, were about to break over them. Abigail might have said: "Let the brute die. Nabal is his name, and Nabal, fool, he certainly is. When he is dead, I shall be free from his tyranny and from his drunken and disgusting companionship." But this noble woman remembers that even in his repulsive animalism and intoxication and calculated rudeness, Nabal is her husband. Another woman receiving the tidings about David might have fainted or had hysteria, but Abigail was as quick-witted as she was kind and beautiful. She did the right thing at the right moment. Hastily summoning her servants, she gave them presents for David and his men and herself followed the caravan in the direction from which the runners said David was coming.

At length, just as the morning mists were lifting, and day was at hand, these two bands, Abigail and her servants, laden with presents, and David and his four hundred men, with their swords clanking on

their thighs, met by the covert of the hill. So, on our way to sin and folly, warnings and intercessions come to stay us in the madness of our folly and save us from sin and suffering. The speech which the beautiful Abigail made to the young and enraged chieftain is one of the most beautiful things in the Bible. First of all, she asks David to hold her responsible for what has happened, and that the iniquity be upon her. That has always been a noble woman's, and especially a noble wife's, sweet prerogative: to take upon herself the blame which belongs to others. What a vicarious sufferer every good woman is, and how many blows she bears which are directed at others. Then Abigail tells the truth about her husband, saying to David that he is both irresponsible and worthless. "Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this son of Belial, even Nabal, for as his name is so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him." It was as if Abigail had said, "Brutus is his name and brute he is." She explains to David how she had not seen his young men when they came, else a much different answer would have been rendered. Then, in a wonderfully winning way, she goes on to plead with David, taking for granted that already she has won her cause and dissuaded him from the contemplated act of violence; for she tells David that now that the Lord has kept him back from shedding blood and avenging himself, this same grace and blessing of restraint is to be passed on to the four hundred young men who are with him. Sometimes

that is the most effective kind of argument—the appeal to a man's better self, and the assumption that, of course, that better self will rule and dominate.

What blessing was this that she wants David to pass on to his young men? One of the greatest blessings which God can grant to any of us: the blessing of being kept from acts of folly and of transgression which we have almost committed. When we ask God to be kept from sin, and thank him for forgiving sins which we have committed, let us not forget to thank him for keeping us back from the commission of deeds of folly, madness, or of shame.

How nobly and effectively this beautiful woman appeals to David's better nature. She reminds him of the great future which is in store for him. His house will be made a sure house, and he is to be the ruler over Israel; for he is fighting the Lord's battles. The inference, of course, is that David, being destined for this high office, and engaged in this great enterprise, fighting the Lord's battles, cannot descend to personal feuds and the wreaking of personal vengeance. How many would be delivered from the misery of sin and sorrow, if, when tempted, they would remember their high calling, how they are fighting the Lord's battle, for every good man in every age is doing that, and thus remembering the great task set before them, refuse to turn aside to engage in bitter and foolish disputes, or work a paltry revenge.

Abigail told David the very thing which he needed

to be told at that time: that, although Saul had risen up to pursue him and seek his soul, David would be victorious and one day would be king. We read in another place how Jonathan came to David in a dark hour in his life in the Wood of Ziph and strengthened his hand in God. Here we have the lovely Abigail doing that very same thing. She strengthens his hand in God and keeps him back from cruelty and bloodshed by reminding him of the great destiny in store for him. Not David only, but many a great actor in the history of the world, and many a good and nameless man, unknown to fortune and fame, has been encouraged to persevere and has been restrained from folly and crime by the intervention of some pure and beautiful woman, who knew his capacities and believed in him.

It is at this place in the intercession of Abigail that she employs that metaphor which makes this chapter forever memorable, one of those master touches which only masters of words can produce. She tells David that he is bound up in the bundle of life, that just as precious articles hidden away in the center of the bundle or package are safe, so David is safe in the hands of Providence. This is a phrase I can remember hearing frequently on the lips of my father in his prayers at the family altar, praying that his children might be bound up in the bundle of life. There are three ways in which you can take that wonderful metaphor. First of all, as an assurance of our safety amid the dangers of our daily

life. We are in God's hands, and nothing can hurt us or harm us. The angel of his Providence encamps about us. If you are anxious and troubled or worried about health, or work, or personal fortune, fall back upon the arms of omnipotent Providence. Then, there is a second way in which you can take this beautiful phrase. We can use it as expressing our relationship through saving faith to Christ. He has bound us up in the bundle of eternal life by his redeeming love. It can be used also with a still wider significance, as setting forth the hope of immortality, that even in death those who belong to the Lord are bound up in the bundle of life. As an old expression of the Talmud puts it, "The souls of the righteous are hid beneath God's glorious throne."

Abigail concludes her eloquent plea by telling David that when all the things which she has predicted have come true, and he has become king over Israel, it will be no grief unto him that he has shed blood without cause, or avenged himself. All she asks of David is that in that day he will not forget the woman who kept him back from sin. How true that is. David would not be sorry that he had been restrained from a cruel and senseless massacre. No one will ever live to see the day when he is sorry that he refused to yield to temptation, or did not carry out an evil purpose conceived in a moment of anger and passion. Woman either incites man to his worst or keeps him back from it and inspires him to his best. Jezebel was a strong-minded but evil-disposed

woman who stirred up her husband to the commission of crimes from which he himself drew back. When he was pining and unhappy because he could not get possession of Naboth's vineyard, she showed him how to murder Naboth in a judicial manner and take possession of the coveted vineyard. Lady Macbeth was of the same order. When Macbeth hesitated to take the life of the sleeping Duncan, she stirred him up to the murder, saying:

> "Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour
> As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem,
> Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
> Like the poor cat i' the adage?"

But of the nobler type is Abigail, who appeals to the higher nature of David and saves him from his worst. Such a woman, too, was Claudia, the wife of Pilate, who by her dream sought, but in vain, to keep Pilate back from sentencing Jesus to be crucified.

David never showed himself to better advantage than at this moment. A less wise and a less finely wrought man would have told Abigail to be gone, brushed her and her caravan and her gifts out of the way, and pushed on to the contemplated and avowed deed of enormity. David had sworn a vow in the presence of all his men that he would wipe out the whole house of Nabal before the morning light. Now he has the courage to draw back from that vow, and

this in the presence of the men who had heard it. In contrast with this sensible and courageous act of David, was the conduct of Darius, who was trapped into making a decree which condemned Daniel to the lions' den, greatly to that monarch's sorrow; and Herod, who had John the Baptist beheaded because he was ashamed to go back on his oath made before his drunken banqueters at the birthday supper. How much sorrow and pain and misery, and all needless, is due to the fact that a man in a moment of misunderstanding or irritation or anger has set himself to do a certain thing, and then in a calmer moment, even when he sees that it is not the right thing to do, but foolish and dangerous, nevertheless goes on to the commission of it, simply because he said he would do it. Christ immortalized the wisdom of David in the brief parable of the two sons, one of whom said to his father, when he was invited to go and work in the vineyard, "I will go, and then went not"; whereas the other said, at first, in anger and ingratitude, "I will not"; but thinking better of it, he repented and went. So conscience speaks to us all, not always through such a beautiful mediator as Abigail, nevertheless clearly and distinctly.

When Abigail returned to her palace she waited until the sun was high before she informed her husband of what had happened, because he was dead drunk. But in the morning, when the wine was gone out of him, she told him what she had done and how

she had delivered him and his household from the vengeance of David. Either in the passion of anger or rage, or under the touch of dread, Nabal suffered a paralytic stroke, and in a few days was dead. His heart became, it is said, "as a stone." It was that hard long ago, even the day he married the lovely Abigail.

It is not strange, after what we have seen of Abigail, and after what we have heard from her lips, that David should have thought that this was the woman to be his companion and helper and to encourage him and strengthen him to fight the Lord's battle. The sequel was another marriage, and the young and handsome and anointed, though uncrowned, king of Israel takes as his wife the widow of Nabal. There the curtain drops on the story. But we doubt not that in the companionship and affection of affectionate and gifted David Abigail found ample compensation for the days of suffering and loneliness which she had spent with Nabal, the fool and the beast.

Things are different in the world to-day from what they were then; and yet to-day, just as that time, marriages for the sake of wealth or station, without regard to true affection, hold out as little promise as the marriage of Nabal and Abigail. For Christian young men and young women there are two common sense principles, the soundness of which has been tested by long experience. In the first place,

that there ought to be no marriage where there are no bonds of mutual love. In the second place, that there ought to be no marriage where one is not a lover of the One altogether lovely, the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many who think, and not without reason, that Christian ministers should not solemnize with the sacred language of the Christian service a marriage where both of the contracting parties are not followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and do not undertake to rear a Christian home.

This tragedy of Abigail and Nabal has a happy and pleasing ending in the marriage of Abigail to David. Unfortunately, this may not often happen, and noble, gifted, fair, and believing personalities have no course but to drink the cup of disillusionment and disappointment, believing, where they cannot see, in the ultimate goodness of life, and turning their hearts to the love of Him who never disappoints and who never fails.

In her winning intercession with David on the way to sin, Abigail is forever a type of Christ and the Holy Spirit, pleading and interceding with us on our way to sin and the judgment. By the covert of the hill, even the hill of Calvary, the Son of Man meets us and pleads with us to stay our hand from folly and from sin. To those who plan some evil—and perhaps there are such here to-night—Christ comes to meet them by the way and to tell them that to-morrow, if indeed they yield to his gentle per-

suasion, they will not be sorry that they turned back on their path. And to all who are on their way to a final rebellion against God, to a final rejection of his redeeming love, the Son of Man comes to plead with melting looks and with pierced hands, saying to them, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die!"

VI

VASHTI AND AHASUERUS

A WOMAN'S "NO"

But the queen Vashti refused to come. Esther 1: 12.

"No" is the greatest word in every language. Almost the shortest, it is the hardest of all to pronounce. Never was it spoken under more difficult circumstances, or with grander emphasis, than on this occasion by Vashti, the Queen of all the Persias. Ahasuerus reigned despot over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India's coral strand to the golden mountains of Ethiopia. But over the soul of Vashti he exercised no dominion. The world answered his slightest whim with an ignoble "Yes"; but a noble woman answered his unholy command with a fearless "No," the echoes of which still resound in the corridors of time.

Midnight in the banqueting hall of Shushan's palace. This was the huge palace built by Cyrus on the banks of the Eulai. For seven days a great banquet had been going on. A hundred and twenty-seven of the princes of the provinces had assembled from all parts of the world. The scene was one of splendor, magnificence, and dazzling riot, such as only the ancient Oriental world could display. The floor was of red, blue, white, and black marble.

Great marble columns held up the roof, under which was hung a great veil, or canopy, of white, green, and blue velvet, caught with streamers of fine linen and purple to silver rings fastened to the columns. The beds, or couches, upon which the banqueters sat, or reclined, were of silver or gold and decorated with the beasts and deities of Persian superstition and imagination. The cups out of which the princes and the lords drank were of pure gold, and each one chased with a different design.

Many of the revelers are by this time dead drunk, lying on the floor, or being carted off on litters by weary slaves. On a raised platform, dancing girls wind their wanton movements to the accompaniment of the strings of sensuous music on the harp, psalter, flute, cornet, sackbut, and dulcimer, a music now and then interrupted by the hiccoughs or the maudlin shouts of the drunken revelers. Sweet incense floods the room with fragrance and pleasing odors. On the most gorgeous and elevated seat is the host and master of the feast, the despot of the world, Ahasuerus. By some, he is identified with that Artaxerxes who scourged the Hellespont with chains; and by others, with Xerxes, who in 482 forced the pass at Thermopylæ, only to go down in defeat in the waters of the Bay of Salamis, where the history of the world was changed. Ahasuerus ruled the world, but not his own spirit. How unkingly and uncrowned he now is! His eyes are bloodshot, his breast contracting with hiccoughs, maudlin and drunken, and on his

knee a half-naked Circassian girl. Through his dull and alcohol-stupefied brain there is running the question, "What more can I do to startle and entertain these guests?" Then a gleam comes into the drunken man's eye. He has an idea. The queen! The beauty of all the world! To display her before his drunken lords—that will be something unheard of, a real climax to the seven days' orgy. Here, Harbona, Bigthon, Carcas, Abagatha, and the rest of you seven chamberlains! Bring in the queen! Vashti, the beauty of the whole earth! the queen! The seven chamberlains look into one another's faces with frightened amazement for a moment, and then go off to the harem to summon the queen. Meanwhile, the lords and nobles, roused out of their drunken stupor by the unprecedented proposal, lift themselves to a sitting position and eagerly look toward the vast door curtained by the white, green, and blue portières.

At length, the heavy curtains are pushed back; and Mehuman, the chief of the chamberlains, with an anxious look on his countenance, advances to the royal seat and whispers to the king, "The queen will not come in." A look of rage and disappointment passes like a storm over the face of the monarch, and he hurls his golden cup against the wall, the red wine making vivid streaks on the white marble, and with his palm he smites the face of his chamberlain. But no; the rage of the king avails him nothing. The queen will not come in, and drunk and crazy though

he is, he does not dare to compel her. "But the queen, Vashti, refused to come at the king's command." She will not strip the veil of modesty from her by exposing herself to the lewd glances and lascivious gestures of the drunken crew who sit about the table of the king. Vashti had counted the cost. She knew what it meant. Here could have been the climax of her glory; but for modesty's sake she puts it all aside. She knows what it will mean, the loss of her crown, degradation, banishment, exile, the miserable lot of a slave girl again, perhaps death by the poisoned cup or the shining steel. Nevertheless, she utters her magnificent "No," and teaches her deathless lesson, and disappears from the stage to make room for that other woman, the Hebrew maid, Esther, in whose greater renown her own splendid witness is too often forgotten.

The palace of Shushan and the proud city of Xerxes to-day are only a heap of dust where wild beasts howl. But searching amid this heap of dust, I came upon this flaming jewel of Vashti's noble refusal, the luster of which is undimmed by the flight of ages. Vashti said "No," and made herself immortal. If she had said "Yes," she never would have been heard of. Nor would Esther ever have been heard of. Parents call their fine daughters Esther. I wonder why they never call them Vashti.

A ringing No saved Vashti from dishonor. She lost position, wealth, adulation, an easy berth in life, but she saved honor and character. A No spoken

in season will guard the young man, and especially the young woman, from hurt and stain and danger. Many a man, and more women, look back to a day, a night, an hour, a moment, and would give all that they possessed if at that turning point they had said "No" instead of "Yes." One of the most notable of Christian workers, and one who exerts an influence second to none, records that the turning point of his life was one night when with a crowd of Princeton students he went down to New York. That night, to the invitations of his friends he said "No." If he had said "Yes," it would have turned him away from his subsequent great career and made his wonderful influence impossible. Only the difference between a No and a Yes; and yet the difference may be that of life and death.

It is easy to say "Yes." That is why so many say it. A man who has fought his way to success attributes much of his present power and influence to the fact that he awoke one day to the danger of saying "Yes" and the wisdom of saying "No." Up to that time he was what he calls a "Yesser." You know the type. He assented to all propositions and said "Yes" to all kinds of invitations. One day, in response to an invitation to some party, he said he would go. But as he was entering the elevator he heard one man say to another, speaking of himself, "You won't see him there. He says 'Yes' to everybody." That set the man to thinking, and he eliminated "Yes" from his vocabulary.

The way of indirection and evasion is often the easiest way; and how often we take it to our ultimate embarrassment, discomfort, or injury. To say "Yes" seems to save from embarrassment, and lets us off easily. But in the end, it brings worry and trouble. One Yes invites and links itself to another. How often, when we are asked to loan some one money, sign a note, go on a board or a committee, attend some conference, luncheon, or dinner, and all contrary to our desire and interest, we say "Yes," because, for the present, it is the easier word. "No" seems abrupt, and almost discourteous; but it tells the truth, clears the atmosphere, and settles the question once for all. "He says 'No' as if he meant it," is the comment people sometimes make on strong characters. There was once a father who trained his son to clench his fists and stretch himself to his full height every night before he went to bed and utter three times the word "No."

"No" lays the foundation for the house of success. A young American, shortly after he arrived in China, was asked to attend a convivial party. Most young men would have gone. It would give opportunity for contacts and friendships. But this young man said: "I did not come here to play. I came to work." The head of the shipping firm heard this, and, impressed by it, gave the young man a position. In a few years he was in a place where he could choose his friends and play when he wanted to.

The world got on the wrong track at the very

beginning because the first woman was not able to say "No." We do not exempt the first man either, for he, too, although he was able to name all the birds and the beasts of the field, does not seem to have had the word "No" in his vocabulary. Ever since, gardens have been lost, blasted, and withered, men and women driven out with tears in their eyes and arrows in their hearts because they said "Yes" to the tempter instead of "No." That was the issue of the first trial and testing of the first man. The ages pass; and now, not in a garden, for that had been lost by sin, but in the wilderness and desert that sin had created, the Second Adam said to temptation and to the tempter his memorable and thrice repeated "No." Since then the world has had hope.

The late senator from Massachusetts, the eloquent and distinguished George F. Hoar, in his reminiscences of his student days at Harvard, tells of a sermon he heard at the college chapel on the text from the Book of Judges, "Thou shalt say 'No.'" He says that the memory of that text and that sermon remained with him all through his life, and he could hear the words as he wrote a page of his autobiography as distinctly as when he first heard them in the chapel. The incident was as follows: Sisera, the captain of the routed army of the Canaanites, was fleeing from the great battle on the banks of the River Kishon. Overcome with fatigue, Sisera alighted from his chariot and took shelter in the tent of one whom he took to be a friendly woman.

Jael received him with all the courtesies sacred to the East. She brought him butter in a lordly dish and gave him fermented milk to drink. Then she covered him with a rug. But before he sank into the sleep out of which he was never to awaken, Sisera charged Jael to stand in the opening of the tent, and if any of his pursuers stopped at the tent and asked if a man had taken refuge there, she was to say "No." "Thou shalt say 'No.'" With the rest of the story, and the ethics, or justifiableness of Jael's conduct in driving a tent pin through Sisera's head while he was sleeping, with that I have no particular interest. Nor do I comment on the fact that Sisera asked Jael to tell a lie. All that aside, the dramatic incident sets forth the truth that, with enemies on his track, eager to shed his blood, a spoken No would have saved his life. The lack of a No meant the death and doom of Sisera.

That little word "No" has saved many a man's life, and the lack of it, the inability to pronounce it, has cost many another man his life. Foes more relentless than those which followed hard after the fugitive captain of the host of Canaan are in pursuit of every man's soul. "Satan hath desired to have *you* that he may sift *you* as wheat." Alas, for the sifting of Satan, if we cannot hurl against his cruel front the incomparable javelin, "No."

There are two sides to influence and character—the negative and the positive. Some men are strongly developed on the affirmative side, but not on the

negative side. The secret of strong character is not merely the ability to receive good influences and respond to the best invitations, but to be able to resist and say "No" to that which is injurious and dangerous. Plutarch writes of a people in Asia who became vassals to one, for the reason that they were unable to say "No." How many become vassals or bond slaves to that which is low and injurious in themselves and in others because they cannot frame their lips to pronounce that brief word "No."

In the world where men and women meet together, a woman's No is more important even than a man's. Here her quick, ringing, resolute No may save not only herself, but some heedless and thoughtless man. Woman is always strategic, because she acts at the sources of human conduct. What we need just now more than anything else is a race of Christian women, young women particularly, who shall say "No" to tendencies and influences, to practices and customs which are not of God or of Christ, but are of the world, the flesh, and the devil. If to all these things the woman says "Yes," then all is lost, just as it was at the beginning in the Garden of Eden. Vashti, though the climax of earthly and physical glory was at hand, refused to soil and demean herself by exposing her person to the lascivious glances of Ahasuerus and his drunken lords. Tennyson in his lines "To the Queen" sings of her—

"O loyal to the royal in thyself."

Every woman has a royalty within her breast, and when she is loyal to that royal in herself, the world is lifted heavenward. By saying "Yes" to every one who comes along, she may become a pleasant plaything, but not the star that guides men to achievement and to heaven. In "Measure for Measure" the pure and lovely Isabella was tempted to procure the release of her brother, who had been sentenced to death, by selling her virtue and compromising her honor. When she refused, her cruel tempter told her, "Then must your brother die." Shakespeare never wrote anything finer and grander than the answer which he puts into the mouth of Isabella:

> "And 'twere the cheaper way:
> Better it were a brother die at once,
> Than that a sister by redeeming him
> Should die forever."

When we assent to do evil, the best part of us dies to God and the truth, and lives only to sorrow and remorse. The battle for the soul is not easy anywhere. But in the complex life of our great cities to-day, with its amusements which so often minister only to that which is low, with its depressing loneliness and solitude, with the intimacies of the boarding house, the restaurant, the shop, and the office, the young man and the young woman who keep themselves unspotted from the world will do well to be armed with a heaven-born No, which falls like a bomb at the feet of temptation.

I draw the bow at a venture; and yet I am sure it is true when I say now, to-night, and in this congregation, that there are some young men and some young women whose greatest need is an immediate and resolute No. Here is one who perhaps has suffered slight or hurt or injury. A voice tempts you to resent, to strike back, to pay as you have been paid, to hate, to refuse reconciliation. To that voice thou shalt say, "No." No happiness was ever found on that path. That way leads to loneliness, darkness, and the night. Here is another who is being urged to take a gain that is in some way dishonest or dishonorable. Money is so necessary, and can procure so many things we want. Just the little sinking of conscience; just the slightest deviation from the truth, and you can take your gain. To that voice thou shalt say, "No." Here is another, who, for the sake of comfort or ease or profit, is tempted to do that which is selfish and which will hurt or harm another. To that, too, as thou lovest thy soul, thou shalt say, "No." Here is another who may be on the point of despair, and how many of them have come in and out of the doors of this church; some now and then known to me, but most of them unknown. You feel that you are at the end of your resources; that the world holds nothing for you; that there is nothing to live for. To that subtle and most dangerous temptation thou shalt say "No." And here is another, adrift on the tide of a friendship or intimacy which cannot be open and free and

honorable. Its stolen waters may seem sweet to you at the moment; but soon they will turn to bitterness and gall. To that temptation thou shalt say "No." Say it now, at once, to-night!

To all these dark spirits, to all these enemies of the soul, thou shalt say "No." But there is one to whose invitation thou shalt say, not "No," but "Yes." Behold this greatest Lover of them all. With pierced hands and melting eye He stands before you and offers you His redeeming love. Do not say "No" to Him. Perhaps you have said it many a time before; but there is One who will not take "No" for an answer, and who says of you, "How can I let thee go?" To Him thou shalt say "Yes"—that everlasting "Yes" that unites your life to Him forever and enrolls you as a citizen of the commonwealth of the redeemed.

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VII

SAMSON AND DELILAH

STRENGTH PROFANED

The Philistines took him, and put out his eyes.
Judges 16: 21.

The Philistines put out his eyes, but not until sin had first put out the light of God's Spirit in his life. Samson is the great comedian and the great tragedian of the Old Testament. Nothing could be more ridiculous than some of his exploits against the Philistines, and nothing more tragic than his downfall. Here was a man whom no man could bind. Armies fled before him like chaff before the roaring wind; yet a woman slew him. He rent a lion as if it had been a kid; but a serpent in the deep grass of sensuality stung him and slew him.

In the very announcement of Samson's coming birth to his father and mother there is a prediction of his fall. It is not said that he shall deliver Israel, but that he shall *begin* to deliver Israel. On Calton Hill in Edinburgh there is a vast ruin—lonely pillars, unlifted arches, and grass-covered pavements and fountains. It was to be a grand palace, but it was never finished. Samson strikes us as a vast ruin. He *began* to do great things, but did not finish. Samson, nevertheless, is one of those provi-

dential and epochal men whom God sends in great crises to deliver men from bondage and from error.

When God wants a great man, he generally commences with his parents and with his grandparents. It is not without its significance that we are told something of the moral character of the fathers and mothers of nearly every great man in the Bible. Here the angel of God commences with special instructions to the mother of the hero who is to be born. Things which are to be left out, even her diet, are mentioned, so that every prenatal influence shall be favorable to the yet unborn child. To check present downward tendencies in humanity, God must commence with the mothers of the race which is to be.

There was nothing accidental about the birth of Samson. He was born for a definite reason. Every one born into life has a reason back of that birth, although ofttimes in the struggles and discouragements and temptations of life we may wonder what the reason is. But an anchor which will hold the ship of the soul steady amid the storms of life is the faith that for each of us God had some worth-while purpose in calling us into existence. This is what renders life reasonable and sacred.

Samson was to be a Nazarite from his mother's womb. Another Nazarite in the Bible was that spiritual Samson of the New Testament, John the Baptist. A Nazarite was from his birth a man devoted in a peculiar sense to God. As no tool or instrument of iron could be lifted over an altar, so no

knife, or iron tool, could be lifted over the body of a Nazarite, for he was to be an altar dedicated to God. This was the meaning of the provision that he could not shave or cut his hair. The seven long braids in which his hair hung over his shoulders were the sign that the Nazarite was an altar man, devoted to God. He was not permitted to touch a dead body, even the body of his mother or father. No wine or strong drink, nor even those things out of which strong drink was made, was permitted to pass his lips. Here it is recognized that intoxicating liquor has the tendency to profane and defile the body which is the temple of the Holy Ghost. The principle which is taught here is that for the highest form of character and service, the ideal thing is not temperance, but total abstinence. Strong drink is raging and wine is a mocker. From the day that Noah lay drunken and uncovered before his sons, down to the young woman, whom recently I saw sprawling, disheveled, and exposed, within a stone's throw of this church, the general effect of strong drink has been to degrade, profane, and defile both body and soul. If one says that it is the fruit of the earth, just as water, let it be answered that strong drink finds more uncleanness and iniquity in man than water. The safe and wise principle is not temperance, but total abstinence. The man or the woman who never takes the first drink will never make a fool of himself or herself or become a drunkard.

There was great rejoicing in the hitherto childless

home in Dan when this infant with the golden hair was laid in the arms of Manoah's wife. Samson, or Sunshine, she called him, and like a bundle of sunshine he was to that mother and to that father. He was not only a strong, healthy, golden-haired infant, but one about whom an angel had told marvelous things. Soon he began to give promise that he would fulfill what had been predicted for him, for the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan.

The next chapter in Samson's life is one through which most young men pass. He fell in love. His choice, however, was not altogether fortunate. In one of his expeditions into the country of the Philistines, he saw a face which captivated him and set him adrift on that great, and yet dangerous, sea of love. There was great distress and consternation in the home in Dan when Samson told them what had happened to him. They asked him if there were no good-looking girls among the women of his own country, that he had to go off and marry a daughter of a despised Philistine. Manoah entreated and his wife wept; but Samson would not be moved. There was only one woman in the world for him, and this was the one he had seen at Timnath. "Get her for me," he said, "for I love her well." Love overleaps the barriers of race, national enmities, religious differences, social separations. It was so in this case. Reluctantly they gave their consent, and Samson, greatly elated, walking on air, went down for a sec-

ond look at the Philistine beauty. On his way down, a lion roared against him. A lion was nothing to Samson, just at that time; and, seizing it by its two jaws, he tore it asunder as if it had been a kid. When he returned from his visit to the woman of Timnath, he found that the bees had hived and that there was honey in the carcass of the lion. The vultures and ants had stripped the bones clean of the flesh, but in the ribs of the beast the bees made their home. Samson took his fill of the honey, and when at his wedding feast entertainment was desired, he propounded his famous riddle, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." The riddle would never have been guessed except for the importunity of Samson's bride, who wept over him and remonstrated with him for keeping the secret from him, and so teased him that at length he told her the answer. This throws much light upon Samson's character and his future undoing. He can rend lions and crack the skulls of Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, but he cannot say No to a woman.

How terribly abject and fallen Israel was at this time is shown by the fact that when the Philistines came up to lay hold on Samson, who had destroyed their crops by loosing in the fields foxes with their tails tied together and a firebrand between the tails, the Israelites, instead of going out to battle against the Philistines, got together three thousand men, not to deliver their country, but with craven spirit to

bind Samson and deliver him over to their enemies. Samson consented to be bound with two new ropes, and then, when he had been ignominiously deposited in the Philistine camp, he burst his bonds asunder as if they had been flax burnt with fire, and wrenching a jawbone from the carcass of an ass, smote the Philistines hip and thigh and slew a thousand of them. Then he sang his song of victory, "With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps; with the jawbone of an ass have I slain a thousand men."

The next chapter in Samson's life commences with another woman, the harlot of Gaza. When the Philistines found that Samson had had the impudence and audacity to walk into their own capital and was being entertained by this "woman of the town," they rejoiced greatly, and shutting up the gates of the city, they said, "When it is day we shall kill him." But Samson stole a march on them. Arising at midnight and finding the great and massive gate locked and barred, he picked it up, bars, pillars, posts, and all, and carrying it a distance of several miles, deposited it in colossal ridicule and satire on the top of a distant mountain. Samson has again escaped the snare of the Philistines. Yet it is clear that he is moving toward disaster and downfall.

The third act in Samson's life commences with another and a third woman. "Three times and out" is an old saying. It was true in the case of Samson. In the Valley of Sorek Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. The Philistines had been

filled with consternation at the damage done their nation by this invincible and unconquerable champion of Israel. But from past experience they knew the side where Samson was weak. Therefore, they began to work on his sweetheart, Delilah, offering her a huge bribe if she would get from Samson the secret of his strength. The right sort of woman and lover would have protected and guarded Samson and the secret of his prowess. But this woman is ready to betray him. When Samson was in one of his high humors and probably just a little under the influence of wine, Delilah began her siege. "Tell me, Samson, what the secret of your great strength is. You know how I admire your wonderful strength. There is no one like you in all the world. But I am curious to know where you get this strength. How could men ever bind you or overcome you?"

Then was the time for Samson to say No. But instead of that, he begins to play and fool with Delilah, telling her his joking falsehood, that if she will have him bound with seven green withes, then he will be just as weak as any other man. The Philistines, thus apprised, furnished the seven green withes, and Delilah bound the joking and infatuated giant hand and foot. Then, with the Philistines waiting outside the door, she called out, "Samson, the Philistines be upon thee!" At that, Samson sprang to his feet, the seven green withes falling from him like threads of tow touched with the fire, and the Philistines fled before him.

Keeping her temper as well as possible, the crafty and subtle Delilah playfully rebukes Samson for having mocked her. "Now, Samson, you lied to me once. This time I want you to tell me the truth. What is the secret of your strength?" The huge joker resorts to another falsehood. This time he says that if he is bound fast with new ropes never used, then he will be weak like other men. The new ropes are furnished, and again Samson is bound hand and foot. But when Delilah shouted, "The Philistines be upon thee!" Samson arose and burst his bonds as if they had been the flimsiest thread.

For the third time Delilah comes to Samson, and telling him plainly that he has lied to her, and yet at the same time caressing him and flattering him, she asks him to tell her the truth about his strength. Samson doesn't tell the truth, but the answer which he gives, and which had to do with his hair, shows that he is beginning to weaken under the continued assault of this bewitching siren. This time he tells her that if she will fasten the seven braids of his Nazarite's hair to the beam of the loom, then he will not be able to loose himself and go free. The seven braids of his sunlight hair with deft fingers Delilah fastens and ties to the pin of the loom. Again she shouts, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson." But Samson, lifting his mighty head and carrying pin, web, beam, and loom with him, goes out to meet his foes.

For the fourth time, Delilah comes to the assault.

This time she hurls her last and most dangerous weapon. "Samson, you don't love me. How can you say that you do, when you have mocked me these three times?" Samson puts her off from day to day, but daily and hourly she came back to him with her appeal and with her reproach. Poor Samson! He loved Delilah, and yet he had not forgotten his consecration and that power of God which was with him and of which his unshorn locks were the sign. But he could not endure the tearful reproaches of Delilah, and in that moment of weakness he told her that the secret of his strength was in his hair, that he was a Nazarite, unshorn from his mother's womb. Were he shaved with a razor, he would be just like other men. No doubt, Samson is going to be careful that Delilah does not experiment as to the truth of what he has just told her. But Delilah knows how to handle him. With flattery and caresses and wine, she puts Samson to sleep; and while he slumbers across her lap, a Philistine comes in, no doubt, handling his razor with fear and trembling, and shaves the head of Samson, the wonderful golden sunlight locks falling at the feet of Delilah. Then for the fourth time, the woman shouts, "The Philistines be upon thee!" Samson has forgotten what he had told Delilah, and getting up upon his feet he says, "I will go out as other times before and shake myself." Alas for Samson! He knew not that the Lord had departed from him and his strength was gone. He was now just an ordinary man, and the Philistines

took him, and boring out his eyes with red-hot irons, bound him with brass fetters, and made him to do the work of an ass in the corn mill at Gaza. One of Milton's greatest poems, "Samson Agonistes," describes the Hebrew hero in prison at Gaza. He puts into the mouth of Samson words of regret that he had forgotten God and his great mission and thrown it all away—

> "In the lascivious lap
> Of a deceitful Concubine, who shore me,
> Like a tame wether, all my precious fleece,
> Then turned me out ridiculous, despoiled,
> Shaven, and disarmed among my enemies."

It is a festal day at Gaza. In the temple of Dagon, three thousand of the lords and ladies of the Philistines have gathered to praise their god, Dagon, and to celebrate the captivity of Samson. All day the wine flowed, and feats and spectacles entertained the rejoicing followers of Dagon. But the crowning feature was to be an exhibition of strength on the part of Samson. The temple rings with their shouts as the huge captive is brought in, led by the hand by a lad. What a sight now is Samson! He who once smote the Philistines hip and thigh, now their slave, grinding out the grain for them, harnessed to the heavy beam, and making the weary and monotonous round, and at every round thinking of his lost glory and might. But during these months of captivity Samson's hair has grown again. Once more he can do great feats of strength. The Philistines in the

galleries wonder at his display of physical might, lifting great millstones as if they were pebbles, breaking heavy beams across his knee, and holding a full-grown man out at full-length from his body. What a giant, and how mighty is Dagon, that he could subdue him and make him his slave!

Between his exploits of physical strength, Samson tells the lad who is his guide to lead him over to the pillars on which the house stands, so that he can lean against them and take a little rest. Suspecting nothing, the lad leads him to the place between the two pillars. Samson puts his right arm around one marble column, and then, reaching out for the other, encircles it with his left arm. To the drunken and delighted spectators in the galleries, Samson seems to be only resting. But Samson is not resting; he is praying, and it is the last prayer of his life, "O Lord God, remember me and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once." Samson in this last prayer recognizes God as the source of his strength. He knew that his hair was grown again, but he also knew that that alone could not give him strength. So he prays, "Strengthen me only this once." Only this once! Once yielding to the temptress was enough to bring Samson to degradation and to prison. Remember that. You may resist temptation ninety-nine times, but if you yield the hundredth time, just once, "only this once" is enough to destroy you. On the other hand, he who repents and turns to God "only this once," can retrieve the ruin of his

life. One surrender can bring to prison and to shame. Thank God, one prayer of repentance can bring us back to forgiveness and hope. Having uttered his prayer, Samson bows himself with all his might. The veins on his massive brow are distended; the muscles in his arms and legs, and across his back stand out like cables. Desperately Samson heaves at the pillars. There is a slight movement in the floor of the galleries, and the shouting, drinking, laughing mob of Philistines look at one another in consternation. What is happening? Is it an earthquake? or are we drunk? What happened they were never to learn, for, the next moment, the pillars which upheld it lifted from under it by the mighty arms of Samson, the whole temple came crashing down in ruin, and under the cloud of yellow dust which rose toward heaven the three thousand Philistines lay buried, and among them Samson. Thus it was that those whom he slew at his death were more than those whom he slew in his life.

This great story teaches its own lessons so clearly that it is hardly necessary to mention them. Nevertheless, we sum them up. In the first place, the downfall of Samson shows us the danger of dallying with temptation. If Samson, at once, instead of trying to lie out of it, had rejected the solicitations of the wanton Delilah, he would have been saved captivity and death. To dally with temptation is to go to your doom. The disaster which befell this once mighty hero also shows how men are overcome by

temptation by degrees, just as the shadow of an eclipse creeps slowly across the face of the sun, and not in a single moment. So temptation slowly casts its blighting shadow over the face of man's soul.

The wreck of Samson, again, solemnly reveals the danger to which even the greatest of men are subject on the side of their physical nature. The spark of temptation is always flying about us. Therefore, carry the gunpowder of your physical nature so that it will not be exposed to these fatal sparks. Remember what the greatest and noblest servant of Christ said: "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." "I keep the body under, lest, having preached to others, I myself should become a castaway."

Samson's tragedy, above every other tragedy related in the Bible, shows the dangerous influence of an evil woman on a man's life. This was not love for a woman, but love for women. "Women and wine" is the refrain of human tragedies which has sounded through the world since the creation of man. As Samson threw everything away in the lap of a harlot, so that amazing and unaccountable and terrible tragedy has been enacted over and over again. Drunk with the madness of sensuality, faithful and devoted husbands and fathers have suddenly been turned into traitors and brutes; and under this terrible spell of the flesh men have thrown away business, ambitions, friends, affection, honor, and the soul

itself. Yet, over against this baleful influence, perhaps the most mysterious and dreadful of powers which operate in human life, we must place the uplifting, ennobling, and inspiring influence of pure and noble women. In all the world, there is nothing to compare with that power, and happy is that man who possesses the confidence and friendship and affection of such a woman, a woman who will not betray the secret of the soul's greatness, but who will guard it from the attacks of the soul's enemies, and by her words, her deeds, and her love lead the man on and out to greater things.

One of the saddest touches in this great tale is what is said about Samson after he had let Delilah shave his head. He said, "I will go out as at other times before and shake myself." But he wist not that the Lord had departed from him. "God comes to us," the old saying has it, "without bell." The most profound and beautiful spiritual experiences may come without warning or without announcement. But God also leaves the soul without bell. A man can lose his spiritual earnestness and power, and think that he is as strong as he was before, whereas he is just an ordinary man now, weak like other men. Samson said that if this or that were done, he would be weak like other men. There are just those two classes —those who are strong in Christ, and who, as Samson is immortalized in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, "Out of weakness are made strong," and those

who have only their own and their natural strength. When we forget God, when we forsake our vows, and turn away from our holy ambitions, then we are weak as other men. As the man is, so is his strength.

One of the most powerful passages in Milton's great poem is the interview in the prison between Samson and the woman who had betrayed him. Delilah is seeking the forgiveness of the bitter and enraged Samson, and when Samson charges her with having cruelly betrayed him, she makes her answer,

"Ere I to thee, thou to thyself wast cruel."

A world of truth is packed into that mighty line. Before any woman or any man or any circumstance can betray you, or be cruel to you, remember that you betray and injure yourself.

"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." "Only this once," only a whispered word to the teasing harlot, and there is great Samson, "eyeless at Gaza, in the mill with slaves." Be on your guard, watch and pray lest you enter into temptation, for "only this once" shall spell your overthrow. Yet I cannot forget how many there are who need to be told something else than this word of admonition and warning. Whether they ever heard a warning or not, only this once, overthrew them. What they need to hear, therefore, and to remember, is that prayer of the penitent Samson, "Lord, hear me and strengthen me only this

once." Turn back to God only this once; repent of your sins and seek his pardoning grace; and the God who strengthened the penitent Samson and gave him back his lost gift, will strengthen you, and make you strong in the power of his might.

VIII

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA

MANHOOD DETHRONED

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. 2 Samuel 12: 13.

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned. Psalm 51: 4.

Some things stand out above others in one's recollections of the past. One of these unerasable memories is the reading of the eleventh chapter of 2 Samuel at family worship. I can see the fire burning on the hearth, and the family assembled for morning worship; and I remember very distinctly the solemn words with which the reading of this chapter was prefaced.

It would not do for such a chapter to be read out of any other book. The Bible alone can relate such things and leave the reader elevated in mind and purified in life. When we read this terrible chapter with its horrible narrative of David's sin, we are tempted to wish that David had died before his life wrote this awful chapter. But God knows best. If David had died before this incident, the Bible would have been lacking in the account of what sin is, in some respects, the greatest sin and the greatest repentance. St. Augustine, in commencing in his Commentary on the Fifty-First Psalm,

says: "With grief indeed we speak, and with trembling. But yet God would not have to be hushed what he hath willed to be written."

Alexander of Macedon used to be painted with his hand resting on his face, as if in reverie. But the real purpose was to hide the scar on his cheek. The Bible paints men just as they are; no scar, birthmark, or deformity, however odious and hideous, is left out. All theories as to human nature vanish and disappear before the fact. To know what man is, all one needs to do is to read what man has done.

> "Not in their brightness, but their earthly stains,
> Are the true seed vouchsafed to earthly eyes.
> And saints are lowered that the world may rise."

While to us this sin is shocking, and in itself, and by reason of several aggravations, is heinous, we ought not to forget that in David's age it was not so regarded. David was an absolute monarch, and as such could take into his harem whom he pleased and kill whom he desired. The thing to note here is, that, although this was so, David was greatly troubled about his crime and took extraordinary means to cover it up and to save himself from punishment.

In Bunyan's "Holy War," the famous town of Mansoul had five gates, and such as never could be opened or forced except by the leave and will of those within. The names of the gates were Eargate, Eyegate, Mouthgate, Nosegate, and Feetgate.

David's city of Mansoul fell through the Eyegate. As he took his ease upon the roof garden of his palace, David saw a beautiful woman washing herself. All that follows is the result of that vision. Probably, this was no sudden breakdown in David's character, but, as is always the case, the last step in a long decline toward evil. We doubt not that his communion with God, about which he could sing so sweetly, had been interrupted before the time and occasion of his fall.

Have you stopped reading your Bible? Have you stopped praying? Have you stopped going to Church? If so, beware. You may feel just as safe morally as before; but you have taken down the sentinels on the walls of Mansoul, and now the enemy can approach as close as he desires.

The sin of David shows, as few chapters in the book of human wickedness and depravity do, the way in which one sin suggests, and sometimes demands, another. First, the idle hour upon the roof of his palace, when he ought to have been at the head of his army, at the siege of Rabbah. If what David saw he had at once put out of his mind, he might have been saved. We are not responsible for temptations coming to our door; but we are responsible for entertaining them. As Luther put it, "I can't keep the birds from flying over my head, but I can keep them from building their nests under my hat."

The worst part of David's sin is not in connection with Bathsheba, but in connection with her hus-

band, the loyal and upright Uriah. Here the man after God's heart appears as a subtle and malignant demon, like the prince of perdition himself. His first thought, because his conscience troubles him and fears startle him, is to save himself from exposure and from vengeance. When the frank and upright Uriah, through his very affection and loyalty to the king, cannot be entrapped into the king's plot, then David plans for his death, not by his own hand, but by the hand of the enemy in battle. He told the captain of the host, Joab, to set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and then in the midst of the fight retire from him that he might be smitten and die. Thus, he would be got out of the way, and apparently would have died a hero's death. Joab carried out the plan, and Uriah fell in battle. The crafty Joab charged the messenger who carried word of Uriah's death to David to tell the king, if he seemed to be angry that so rash an assault was made on Rabbah: "Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also." When the messenger of Joab had told of the repulse and the death of many of David's soldiers, and then concluded by saying, "And Uriah the Hittite died also," David, as if to comfort Joab, and at the same time pay a tribute to Uriah, sent this message to Joab, who, being in the plot, must have smiled when he read it: "Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him."

When a decent period of mourning was over, David married Bathsheba. "But"—and the narration of this crime and sin must always be read in the light of this sentence—"but the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

During this period between the time of the consummation of his crime and the coming of the prophet to denounce him, we are not to think of David as altogether happy and totally indifferent to his sin. It is true, indeed, that sin has terrible powers of deception, and that nothing so blinds us to our sin as the very fact that it is ours. Nevertheless, I cannot believe that David, in view of his past history, in view of his native generosity and tenderness, and in view of the Godward outlook of his life, was altogether without the piercings of conscience. There must have been days when, seated on his roof garden, where he had the vision which led him on to his sin and crime of adultery and murder, he wished that his eyes had been blinded before he had lapsed, and perhaps he would have been willing to give all his kingdom for the peace of mind he had before he fell. But regret is not repentance. The fall and sack of Rabbah, related in a later chapter, probably belongs to the period between the murder of Uriah and the coming of Nathan. If so, the terrible, barbarous, and, for him, unusual punishment which he meted out to the captured people of Rabbah, can be understood. Sometimes, when all is not right within, these external cruelties and ferocities are the

expression of a troubled soul. David was "stumbling upon the dark mountains."

However David suffered, he did not repent. "Then the Lord sent Nathan unto David." The minister's most difficult mission is not to break the news of death to some wife, or child; but to do what Nathan did on this occasion; to speak with one about his sin. Never did a man have a more difficult sermon to preach. David was not only Nathan's king, but his friend. Together they had planned for the building of the temple, and for the order of its service. Together they had walked unto the house of God and taken sweet counsel; and, no doubt, Nathan had oft been charmed with David's music and conversation. Now he must go to rebuke him for his sin. Yet happy was David, who had a Nathan to come to him, and happy is every man to whom some God-sent Nathan comes with the message of God.

Never was a more tender and yet more severe sermon preached by mortal lips. The plan of Nathan is to have David pass sentence upon an imaginary case, and then show him that he has denounced himself. What a parable this is, Nathan's parable of the Lost Lamb! Worthy to stand side by side with that other parable of the Lost Sheep by David's greater Son.

When he came to the palace with his heavy heart, Nathan said: "There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds, but the poor man

had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children: it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter." What a picture that is of domestic happiness and a children's pet! One can almost see the little lamb playing with the children, drinking out of their cup at the table, and sleeping on their bed. "And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him."

Even hearing the faint echo of this parable, as we read it in the Old Testament, serves to rouse our indignation against such a monster of heartlessness, selfishness, and injustice; and we all feel like saying what David said, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." The thing to which Nathan makes his appeal is David's sense of justice and pity, and the thing which he stresses in the conduct of the rich man is his heartlessness and selfishness. After all, every kind of sin can be defined in the terms of selfishness. There is the root of all evil; and so we understand what was meant, when the summary of the Ten Commandments was given in

these words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbor as thyself."

"As the Lord liveth," cried David, reaching for his sword, "the man that hath done this thing shall surely die!" The words were no more than out of his mouth when Nathan said, "Thou art the man!" How could David have missed the point of this exquisite but powerful parable! Only because sin has this strange power to blind us to its presence. All sins look odious save our own, until conscience is awakened. "Thou art the man!" said Nathan. "You were king of Israel, and possessed riches and comforts, palaces and servants, wives, slaves, and concubines. But not satisfied with that for your base indulgence, you had to take the only wife of Uriah, the Hittite, your faithful friend and soldier. And not only did you take his wife, but you took his life. You were not man enough to do it with your own sword, but had him slain in the battle with the sword of the children of Ammon."

Now David saw what Nathan meant. He saw himself like the rich man, a monster of heartlessness and cruelty, and exclaimed, "I have sinned against the Lord!" There is no resentment against Nathan, no foolish effort to exculpate himself, as Saul did when he said, "I have sinned"; and no brazen denial of his transgression; but simple and sincere and unreserved confession, "I have sinned against the Lord." If it had been any other Oriental monarch to whom Nathan had come with such a message, he would

have had his head cut off for his pains; but David said, "I have sinned." Then Nathan said, "The Lord hath put away thy sin." Before we speak of that wonderful forgiveness, let us pause for a moment to consider the punishment which came upon David even though he was forgiven.

The temporal penalties upon sin were not remitted. Nathan pronounces the judgment upon the guilty but now penitent king. This judgment is to consist of the following terrible elements: First, the sword shall never depart from David's house. With the sword he had slain the faithful Uriah. Now the sword would ever flash in his own house, and in his own kingdom. Second, because of his wickedness evil would be raised up against him out of his own house. Third, as he had violated and profaned another man's home, so he would live to see his own home desecrated and his own wives ravished. Fourth, the child which had been born, and which, although it had lived but a brief time, had lived long enough to twine the tendrils of affection about the father's heart, would die. Fifth, David had done his wickedness secretly. The retribution would be public, in sight of the whole nation.

The particular reason given for these terrible and public punishments is that David's sin has made the enemies of God to blaspheme. In every age that has been so. Mark Rutherford, in his "Deliverance," tells of a Sunday morning visit he made to a free-thinking hall in London where they listened to

a debate between an evangelical minister and an agnostic. The minister had spoken of the life to come, and of the bliss which awaits redeemed men in the eternal companionship of the Most High and of the spirits of just men made perfect. His agnostic adversary discounted such an inducement, declaring that, although the New Cut, a miserable section of London, was a poor place, he would rather sit there all day with his feet on a basket than lie in the bosom of the just men made perfect portrayed in the Bible. David, above all the others, he singled out as the most notorious of these eminent saints, and amid the uproarious applause of his auditors, rehearsed David's crimes, and declared that this treacherous villain would have been tried by a jury of twelve men and hung outside Newgate if he had lived in the nineteenth century.

How often has this sneer been repeated, and how often has it been said that David confessed his sin and repented only when he could no longer hide it and judgment threatened him. The answer to all this is to read the list of punishments which fell upon David, and the series of agonies through which he passed. He had to fear not only his own grief for the child, but the anguish of its mother. "He that doeth wrong," says St. Paul, "shall receive the wrong which he hath done." In other words, not only are we punished for our sins, but very often the punishment assumes the form of the sin which we have committed. Jacob deceived Esau, and lived to be cruelly

deceived by his own sons. David defiled another man's home, and lived to see his own home defiled. He befouled himself with his sensuality and animalism, and lived to see his own daughter defiled by Amnon. He was a traitor to his faithful soldier, Uriah, and lived to see his own army turn against him. He slew Uriah with the sword, and lived to see the sword in the hand of Absalom murder his brother Amnon, and flash in the rebellion led by the king's beloved son. That David recognized retributive justice in these woes which came upon him, is shown first of all by what he said when Shimei cursed him when David had to flee the city. One of the king's followers wanted to cut off the head of Shimei; but David said, "Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him." And second, by the words of David's lament, when the runner from the battle in the Wood of Ephraim delivered his terrible tidings, and said, in answer to David's inquiry, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" "The enemies of my lord the king, and all those that rise up against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is"; and David, much moved, went up to the Chamber over the Gate and wept, and as he went thus he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee; O Absalom, my son, my son!" In the bitterness and pathos of that lament, it is not difficult to catch the note of self-reproach and condemnation, as if David had said, "My own sins are finding me out."

Great and beautiful and sincere is David's repentance. The immediateness with which forgiveness is announced shows the depth and sincerity of his repentance. He said, "I have sinned against the Lord." The more familiar echo of this repentance we have in that great song of penitence, the Fifty-First Psalm, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." Men have asked how could David say that. Had he not taken a man's wife, sinned against her, and sinned against her husband whom he had treacherously slain? What then means this, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned"?

In view of what it teaches about man's duty to man, and the penalties which it pronounces upon injustice and cruelty, and social injustice of every sort, we need have no fear that the Bible underestimates the injury and hurt that man's sin does to his fellow man. Indeed, Christ in his great sermon tells men who come to the altar with a gift, and have some wrong unatoned for in their history, to go first to their brother and be reconciled to him, and then come to the altar of divine forgiveness. But the fact is that all social and moral obligations are founded upon God's holy law. It was just because he had sinned so deeply against Bathsheba, and against Uriah, that David had sinned so terribly against God, for back of humanity, and in humanity, is God.

St. Augustine, in his sermon on the Fifty-First Psalm, answering this question, how could David say,

"Against thee only have I sinned," puts it well when he says, "Because Thou alone art without sin." However dark his transgression before men, it was darker and more odious in the sight of God, who is without sin. True repentance will always be overwhelmed with this thought, and will cry, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

Because David's repentance was genuine, his forgiveness was immediate and beautiful. The Lamb of God was slain from the foundations of the world, and no measure of time can measure the long preparation of God to forgive man's sin. But the quickness and instantaneousness of that forgiveness, where penitent hearts cry, "I have sinned," is likewise beyond the possibility of human computation. So David, wonderful David, terrible also in this chapter of his life, greatly loving, and greatly sinning, at once the most lovable and most detestable of Old Testament characters, now greatly repenting, comes home to God, and until the whole ransomed Church of Christ has been "saved to sin no more," the story of his fall and repentance and forgiveness will, as David in his prayer asked that it might do, "Teach transgressors Thy ways."

There was joy among the angels of heaven when David repented. If the repentance of one soul creates more joy in heaven than the repentance of another, then never has there been so much joy in heaven as when David repented. If heaven is capable of sor-

row, never was there such sorrow in heaven as when David fell. Even the angels refused the music of their harps during the time between David's fall and David's repentance. One angel said to another, "Take thine harp and give us melody this day." But the angel answered, "I cannot sing, for David, the man after God's own heart, the man who stole the music of heaven and set it to vibrating among the sons of men, is fallen." But when the tidings came that David had repented, that he had said, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight. . . . Cast me not away from thy presence. Take not thy Holy Spirit from me," then there was joy in heaven again. Every harp was lifted and every tongue was loosed in praise of Him who turns the hearts of kings as the rivers of water are turned.

It was the story of the death of a lamb, only a little innocent lamb, that broke David's heart and showed him how great a sinner he was and brought him to repentance. So it is nothing more, and nothing less, than the story of the death of a Lamb. God's lamb, the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world, that brings men to repentance, shows us how great our sin is, and how much greater is God's forgiveness. O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world!

IX

PILATE AND CLAUDIA

A WOMAN'S INTUITION

When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. Matthew 27: 19.

Did you ever dream about Christ? You dream of those whom you love, or hate, or fear; but did you ever dream about Christ? Has he reality enough in your life to be the subject of a dream?

In one of the churches of Rome, pilgrims from all over the world go to ascend on their knees the Scala Sancta, or the marble stairs, where Christ is said to have stood when arraigned before Pilate. Although one cannot accept these stairs as genuine, one is moved to remember that marble steps like these were once stained red with the dripping blood of the scourged Son of Man. To-night, with awe and reverence, we draw nigh to the judgment seat of Pilate.

I like to visit historic battle fields, where hundreds of thousands of men have met in conflict and in devotion to principle or to country. How can one stand at Bannockburn, or Hastings, or Shiloh, or Marathon, without having one's soul stirred within him? To-night we are to visit a historic battle field; not a

battle field where armies clashed, but the battle field of a soul, where light and darkness, truth and error, met in dispute for the dominion of a human life. The battle commences with the statement that Pilate was "determined to release Jesus." It ends with the statement that he "delivered up Jesus to be crucified."

The name Pontius Pilate is spoken more frequently in the Church than any other name, save that of Christ himself. The Atonement was an eternal process. Yet it had a time element in it, and that time element is marked by the phrase, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate."

How suddenly the hour of moral crisis strikes, and how unexpectedly we come to the turning points in life when decisions must be made, and must be made at once. The night before this memorable Friday, Pilate spent in his palace in his usual pleasures and dissipations. Little could he have thought that an obscure Galilean peasant was going to precipitate a crisis in his soul. But in the gray dawn of the morning, a tumult at the gate of his palace awakens him, and there stands Jesus waiting to be judged. Your trial and testing time may come very suddenly. Therefore, watch and pray, lest it come upon you unprepared and ye enter into temptation.

The accusation which the Jews brought against Jesus was that he perverted the people, forbidding them to pay tribute to Cæsar, and saying that he was Christ, a King. The moment Pilate saw Jesus

and heard what the Jews had to say, he had the conviction and feeling that Jesus was right, innocent, and the Jews wrong. Ever we like to believe that truth and right have a way of declaring themselves, an accent which shows their power and reality, even under the most adverse circumstances. Pilate's first attempt to evade jurisdiction in this case was by telling the Jews to take Him themselves, and judge Him according to their own laws. But the crafty scribes and Pharisees answered, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." Pilate, therefore, had to proceed with the case.

In a private interview with the prisoner Pilate begins to question Jesus. Pilate was a bloody man, unspeakably cruel and corrupt, and had even gone the length of mingling the blood of some of the Galileans with the blood of their own sacrifices in the temple. Yet in this interview with Jesus all that was good and worthy in Pilate rose to the surface. His examination of Jesus served only to confirm the first impression as to his innocence and righteousness.

Pilate: "Art Thou the King of the Jews?"

Jesus: "Sayest this of thyself, or did others tell it thee?"

Pilate (with contempt, feigned at least): "Am I a Jew? Thine own people have brought thee here. What hast thou done?"

Jesus: "My kingdom is not of this world."

Pilate: "Art thou a king then?"

Jesus: "To this end came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

Pilate: "What is truth?"

Either Jesus did not answer, or the answer is not recorded. There are three ways in which you can take that question of Pilate, "What is truth?" First, that it was just a jest. "What is truth?" said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for the answer. Second, you can take it as expressing an earnest inquiry; Pilate really wanted to know what truth is. Third, and more likely, that it was a half-sad, half-bitter confession, or soliloquy, on the part of Pilate, that truth had escaped him. Truth! What is truth? And, little as Pilate knew it, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, was speaking with him.

When he came out from this interview, Pilate announced to the crowd of scribes and Pharisees and their followers his verdict: "I find no crime in Him. You are altogether mistaken about Him. He is no pretender to your throne, or to Cæsar's. All that He is interested in is truth. He is another would-be discoverer of the undiscoverable." The Jews, however, were loath to lose their prey, and began to shout, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, and beginning from Galilee even unto this place." Troubled Pilate caught at that word, Galilee. Here was a chance to shift the responsibility of judgment to some one else. Galilee was under the immediate jurisdicition of

Herod, and Herod happened to be in town at that time. So off to Herod Pilate sent Jesus. There Jesus, in answer to the curious questions of Herod, spoke not a word; and Herod, arraying Him in a crimson robe, as if to mock His kingly claims, sent Him back to Pilate.

Pilate has received the bad news that tne Prisoner is back on his hands, and is just about to ascend the judgment seat again when a slave whispers in his ear a message from his wife. "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." This message from his wife, whom Pilate evidently loved, made him all the more anxious about condemning Christ to death, and he resorted to two extraordinary expedients. The first was that he should release Christ to them, for it was the custom to release at the time of the feast any prisoner whom the people should name. But when Pilate made his proposal, to his disappointment and dismay the crowd shouted for Barabbas, a notorious thief and murderer. Then the perplexed procurator had Jesus taken out and scourged by the soldiers, hoping that this would satisfy the hatred and anger of the Jews. When he had been scourged and crowned with thorns, Pilate had him brought in again, and as he stood before them, the blood streaming from his wounds, Pilate exclaimed, "Behold the man!" But they roared in answer, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" as if the sight of his blood had only served to rouse them to the

greater pitch of fury. Blocked at every turn in his effort to set Jesus free, and frightened at length by the raucous cry from some one in the crowd, "Thou art not Cæsar's friend!" Pilate called for a basin of water, and washing his hands, a symbolic act, expressing his innocence, he said: "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man. See ye to it." "Then he delivered him therefore to them to be crucified." The battle is over. Henceforth, Pilate will be forever remembered in that clause of the Apostles' Creed, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate."

The turning point in that dramatic struggle was the message from Pilate's wife. It was, as it were, a moment of breathing, a pause, a cessation of hostilities, a truce of God, when Pilate was given his great opportunity; when heavenly voices and influences spake and moved; and all on the side of the right and truth and Christ. When that voice speaks, to heed it is to live; to disobey it, is to die. It is God's acceptable time.

This warning voice and heavenly whisper came to Pilate through a woman. It often comes that way. Christ has no more powerful advocates than believing and loving wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. Although we have just this brief fragment in St. Matthew's Gospel about Pilate's wife, we are able to form a very clear idea of her and her character. She must have been living up to whatever light she had, whether she was just a pagan, or a recent convert to Judaism. She was one who was ready to obey

whatever God might speak to her soul. We wonder if she had heard of Christ, except through the dream. Perhaps some slave had reported a saying of Jesus, or a healing miracle that he had wrought; or perhaps, when Claudia was being carried in her litter through the streets of Jerusalem, she had seen his face and heard his voice. At all events, she had the conviction that Jesus was a just and righteous man. Man's judgment is superior to that of woman; but a woman's intuition is superior to that of a man.

This woman had independence of thought and courage of action. In spite of the verdict of the official world, Jerusalem, and the passions of the populace, she holds that Jesus is a righteous man, and in a most courageous way gives expression to her conviction. Of all persons in Jerusalem at the time of the trial of Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, friend or foe, disciple or stranger, this woman, the wife of Pilate, is the only one who dares to say a word in behalf of the lonely prisoner.

The message which she sent to Pilate shows her loyalty to conscience, and that she put right above all else. It reveals, too, an affection for Pilate. We are glad to know that some one loved him, and that he evidently loved this woman. Faithful, courageous, and devoted, she would, if she could, keep Pilate back from the great transgression.

In the tragedy of Pilate, his wife appears as a type of woman as an intercessor, when her voice speaks to keep man back from evil, supporting and

seconding his good impulses and warning against the worse. She endeavors to shed the light of better impulses on the darkened path of man. Abigail, the beautiful wife of Nabal, who persuaded David to turn back from his bloody vengeance on which he had set out, is another fine example of woman in the exercise of this high office.

We often come upon churlish husbands who are altogether unsympathetic with the religious views and practices of their wives. Such women must be religious and faithful to their Church in spite of their husbands. But it is always a more serious situation when it is a wife who is hostile to religion and to the Christian life and practices of her husband. Here the downward pull is much greater than in the other case, and is a handicap hard to overcome. Whatever a man looks for or expects in the woman he shall marry, this, first of all, is the indispensable thing, and for which there is no substitute, a believing heart. "Favor is deceitful, beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." That man is fortunate, indeed, who has such a wife; one whose very dreams will be for his moral good and protection, whose every attitude, word, and thought will be such as would tend to keep him back from the pit of sin and folly. Far better to take the journey solitary and alone than to take it with one who would lead you from the path, or who would endeavor to persuade you that the heavenly light that shines upon your path is only a mirage, and

that the whispers of conscience and hope are but the imagination of the mind. We speak particularly of the way in which wives can help their husbands on the road to heaven, something that receives repeated mention and recognition in the Bible. Yet we do not forget the influence of good men upon women. Therefore, we say now to all husbands, friends, lovers, What can your wife, your friend, your companion, say for you? Do you help her or hinder her on the road to heaven? If you are not trying to go yourself, that is sad enough and bad enough. But still worse and still sadder that you should endeavor to keep her from going to heaven. Christ's words about the millstone and the sea cannot be limited to little children. One of "these little ones" is a phrase which takes in women also. Of them, too, Christ said, "Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones to stumble, it were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck, and that he were drowned in the midst of the sea."

There are men here to-night who are on a wrong path: they are working dishonestly, planning some wrong, living in impurity, or trampling some sacred claim and relationship under their feet. There are others here who, like Pilate, are about to sentence Christ to be crucified. To them, therefore, I make this appeal. I speak to husbands to whom their wives are as messages and whispers from heaven, warning them against contemplated evil, pleading with their better nature, urging them to choose

Christ, and to do nothing against that "just and righteous One." What is your response to the voice of that most eloquent of preachers, who daily leaves you without excuse?

I speak to all young men who have for friends and companions or fiancées believing young women who would have them live cleanly, honestly, and with faith in God. Follow them; do what they say. Heaven speaks through their voices, their eyes, and sometimes, alas! their tears. And to all men who have godly mothers, living in this world or in the unseen world, and who plead with them to keep themselves unspotted from this evil world and do nothing against Christ, to you, too, I make this appeal. Heed their warning. It is worth all the collected counsel and wisdom of this world.

The entreaty and warning of Pilate's wife came just at the turning point, the crisis, in Pilate's battle. Had he done then the decisive thing, he would have been saved from his great crime. But after this message was received and not obeyed, Pilate fights a losing battle. There is always an accurate timing of God's warnings and messages with the need of our souls. Just as he was going on to the judgment seat, Pilate got the message of his wife's dream. So, just at the critical moment, when most we need the voice of heaven, God in some way sends his messenger. This night may be the crisis, the turning point for an immortal soul. God may have decreed that just at this particular time, just at this point,

just at this present crisis in your personal and moral history, you should hear this sermon, based on the message which God sent to Pilate just at his hour of greatest need through the dream of his wife. If this is so with any one here to-night, then do not refuse or disobey the voice which speaks from heaven and which would hold you back from sin, break the bonds of some evil habit, or keep you from pronouncing a sentence against Jesus Christ who died for you. For you this is the critical hour. In the acceptable time God calls for you. Now answer Him, and call upon thy God!

X

JAEL AND SISERA

KILLED IN HIS SLEEP

She brought forth butter in a lordly dish. Judges 5: 25.

WHATEVER one sees in the famous art galleries of Europe, one is almost certain to see a painting of Judith with the head of Holofernes in her hand, after she had treacherously slaughtered him in his sleep. The original in ancient Israel of the Judith of the Apocrphyal books is Jael of the Book of Judges. Both women accomplished the assassination of an enemy of Israel through treachery, female charms, and the prostitution of friendship. Both, however, were actuated by other than motives of personal revenge, and both are celebrated as heroines in the history of Israel.

Nations and men soon forget the judgments of the Lord. Man ever seems unwilling to learn by experience, and tries the golden portals of the future with the blood-rusted key of the past. Great deliverers had been sent, but the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord when their deliverers were dead. This time God sold the people into the hand of Jabin, the King of Canaan, and for twenty years Sisera, the captain of Jabin's host, and a sort

of Canaanitish satrap in Israel, oppressed mightily the children of Israel. No arm was lifted to smite the oppressor until a great mother in Israel, Deborah, arose, and with her inspired eloquence underneath the palm tree in Mount Ephraim stirred the people of Israel to action. The one to whom she made her chief appeal was Barak. She urged him to take ten thousand men of Naphthali and Zebulon and attack the army of Sisera on the banks of the River Kishon. Inspired by her spirit, Barak said he would go; but upon one condition—that Deborah go with him. To this she assented; but, predicting the manner of Sisera's death, told Barak that his campaign would not be for his honor, "for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."

The battle was joined before Mount Tabor on the historic plains of Esdraelon. From the days of Saul down to the recent World War this has been a battle field of the nations. Saul, Barak, Josiah, Napoleon, and the Crusaders all fought on the plains of Esdraelon. Jews, Gentiles, Saracens, Christians, Egyptians, Persians, Turks, Arabs, French, and English have pitched their tents before Mount Tabor, and their waving banners have been wet with the dews of Tabor and Hermon. It is not strange, therefore, that in the Apocalypse the great and final battle between the hosts of Satan and the armies of God is staged at Armageddon, after a village of Esdraelon.

In the great battle which ensued between the ten thousand under Barak and Deborah and the host of

Sisera with his nine hundred chariots, the Canaanites were overthrown with a great slaughter. In the magnificent poetry of Deborah's song, "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." A downfall of rain flooded the River Kishon, and in its waters the chariots were mired, and the horsemen and the footmen were drowned. Seeing that the battle had gone against him, Sisera dismounted from his war chariot in order to make himself less conspicuous and fled on foot. In his flight he came at length to a village of the Kenites, descendants of the father-in-law of Moses, friendly to Israel, but at that time at peace with Canaan. As he approached the settlement, the wife of Heber, Jael, came out to meet him and said: "Turn in, my lord, turn in to me. Fear not." Footsore, famished, and exhausted, Sisera accepted the invitation and went into the tent of Jael, where she covered him with a rug. Not only to quench his thirst and hunger, but to insure himself against any treachery, Sisera asked Jael for a drink. It is a sacred custom and law of the Arabs that they will not attack even their most deadly enemy if he has broken bread with them in their tent. It was for this reason that, at the time of the Crusades, Saladin refused to break bread in his tent with one of the crusading knights, because he said he wanted to kill him. In response to Sisera's request, Jael brought forth butter and milk in a lordly dish. Feeling safe now from any treachery, since he had partaken of hospitality in Jael's tent, and having charged her

that if any pursuer stopped at the tent and said, "Is there any man here?" that she was to say, "No," Sisera, his senses stupefied by the fermented milk, sank into the sleep out of which he was never to awaken.

When he was in a deep sleep, the treacherous woman took a tent peg, and with the heavy mallet in her hand went softly to his side and drove the tent peg through his temple into the ground. She had just committed the murder, when Barak, hot on the trail of Sisera, appeared at the door of the tent. To him Jael said, "Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest." With her hand she swept aside the opening of the tent, and there Sisera lay dead, with the tent peg through his temple. Sisera had started the battle with nine hundred chariots, but a tent peg in the hand of a fierce woman had finished him.

One of the highest pieces of eloquence, in the Bible or out of it, is the song of Deborah. She tells of the uprising of the people, the great battle on the banks of the Kishon, the flight of Sisera, and his death at the hand of Jael.

> Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.

Then, in a few lines, Deborah describes the death spasm of Sisera, his vain efforts to rise, and then the long silence. "At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead."

Then, and what is repulsive to our feelings to-day, with a characteristic feminine note, Deborah, not content to rejoice over the death of the enemy of her country, gloats over the sorrow of Sisera's mother.

> The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself. Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colors, a prey of divers colors of needlework, of divers colors of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil? So let thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

Judged by the standards of Christianity, Jael was a treacherous murderess who violated the sacred laws of hospitality in order to accomplish the death of the Canaanitish captain. After the battle of Bothwell Bridge, one of the English officers was given shelter in the home of one of the Covenanters. This woman was by some severely censured, and was told that she ought to have killed the officer for the good of her country and the Church of Christ, just

as Jael slew Sisera. But Christian morality cannot countenance such an action. We must remember, however, that Jael was not actuated by motives of personal hatred and revenge, and that God, without in any way approving such an act as that of Jael, can nevertheless give it a place in his Providence and overrule it for good.

To-night we lift the story altogether out of its historic significance in the history of Israel, and what we have left is the story of a man who goes to his death by yielding to the flattery and seduction of a woman. In that best part of a man's life, his character, this happens over and over again. Flattery, pleasure, love of ease, all that is noble asleep, and then the blow of judgment and death.

Temptation knows when to strike. The crafty Jacob tempted Esau to sell his birthright when Esau had come in from the field faint from hunger; the devil came to tempt Jesus when he was an hungered. Temptation comes at our weak moments. Sisera ought to have known better than to take refuge in a woman's tent. He ought to have taken asylum in some cave or den of the mountain side. But, tired, hungry, footsore, and off his guard, he accepted the fatal invitation of Jael. Man has a natural liking and craving for woman's friendship and companionship. It is this which clothes woman with a power which, used in the right direction, can be a mighty lever for good, or used in the wrong direction, can be a mighty lever for evil. Woman can touch the chords

of man's life with an angel's hand, or she can sweep it with the hand of a demon. How many, caught and beguiled by that worse and lower music, have marched, like Sisera, straight to their death in a woman's tent.

"She brought him butter in a lordly dish." This lordly dish was used only when the most honored and distinguished guests were in the home. The use of this dish by Jael made Sisera feel that Jael thought it a high honor to entertain him, and thus any suspicions he might have had were set at rest. Under the spell of flattery, men are often fools immeasurable, and in its intoxication are led to do things that in the clear light of reason they would never have done. "She brought him butter in a lordly dish." That has spelled the downfall of many a man. In the memorable chapter in the Book of Proverbs, where a woman leads a man down to the chambers of death, it is the weapon of flattery which she employs. "With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."

The milk which Jael gave Sisera is supposed to have been fermented, and thus, as in many of these tragedies with which we have dealt in this series of sermons, intoxication played its part. This we know

was so in the case of Nabal, and Vashti, and Herod, and it was probably so in the case of David's downfall and Samson's. Under the influence of strong drink, foolish, wicked, disgusting, and self-destructive things are done. It is just as well for young men and young women to remember that, regardless of whether it is taken under prohibitory law or not, the effects of strong drink are always the same. It imperils body, mind, and soul. There are so many enemies, deceivers, flatterers, and foes abroad that the wise man will see that none of his faculties are dulled or his senses stupefied by strong drink.

Sisera died in his sleep. If he had died in battle on the banks of the Kishon, or if he had perished after a struggle with this fierce Amazon in whose tent he had taken refuge, that would have been different, and more like a soldier's death. But here is the great captain of the host, killed in his sleep, without knowing what had happened to him, without striking a blow in his defense. There are times when men are as helpless before the lifted hammer and nail of temptation and sin as the slumbering Sisera was before the hammer and nail of Jael.

One of these times is when conscience is asleep. When a man is intent upon doing a certain thing, or gratifying a certain desire, he can always get an assent to it from some one else, or from his own reasoning, and thus get what he desires. Like Balaam, who was told not to go, and trifled with that command, and then seemed to receive a sanction to go,

we can tease and coax our conscience until it seems to grant us its permission. This is because conscience is asleep. The star of conscience is obscured with the mist and fog of desire.

> "Then keep your conscience sensitive,
> No inward token miss."

Another time when men are easily overcome by the foe is when ambition is asleep. An honorable ambition and purpose in life, the desire to do something worth while before you die, is a strong incentive to right and a wall of defense against evil. John Milton was determined to write something such as after generations would not willingly let die, and for that great end he kept himself unspotted from the world and had a just and pious reverence for "my own person." "The great misfortune of my life," wrote Robert Burns, "was to want an aim. Thus abandoned of aim or view in life, with a strong appetite for sociability, as well as from native hilarity, it will not seem surprising that I was generally a welcome guest where I visited, or any great wonder that always where two or three met together there was I among them." Nothing could please me better than to know that something said here in these sermons had kindled the imagination and ambition of some young man and filled him with a desire to do something great and worthy in life. Every one is born into the world with a purpose. Let the thought of your work stir you, marshal your feelings, and in the

hour of temptation keep you back from wrong. Another time when a man falls an easy victim to his foes is when his honor sleeps. When the roll of a certain French regiment was called, the answer which has now become a proverb was given: "Dead on the field of honor!" That is a good place to die; but what if one dies upon the field of dishonor? Honor is one of the sentinels on the walls of the soul. There is a mighty upholding power in the conviction that there is a right and a wrong, an honorable and a dishonorable, and that the one calamity which can overtake a man is to do that which is dishonorable. If your own self accuses you, none of the honors which the world may bestow upon you will mean anything but bitterness and remorse. The accusation of conscience speaks louder than the trumpet of acclaim.

Few things in history are sadder, and yet more illustrative of human nature, than Mark Antony's flight after the ships of Cleopatra in the great naval battle of Actium, where the squadrons of Cleopatra and Mark Antony met the squadron of Cæsar Augustus. The issues of the day were still undecided, when the sixty ships of Cleopatra left the line of battle, sailing with a fair wind toward Peloponnesus. As Plutarch puts it: "Here it was that Antony showed to all the world that he was no longer actuated by the thoughts and motives of a commander or a man, or, indeed, by his own judgment at all; and what was once said as a jest, that the soul of a lover lives in some one else's body, he proved to be a serious truth,

for as if he had been born part of her and must move with her wheresoever she went, as soon as he saw her ship sailing away, he abandoned all that were fighting and spending their lives for him and put himself aboard a galley of five ranks of oars, to follow her that had so well begun his ruin and would hereafter accomplish it."

What was done there on the stage of ancient history is repeated over and over in the less public arena of men's lives. Caught with some mad desire or mad infatuation, men forget ambition, obligation, sacred rights, natural ties, and, with their honor asleep, are put to death.

> "But where you feel your honor grip
> Let that be aye your border."

Many are killed when their religion is asleep. This sleep is fatal. Religion is the chief defense of the soul. Samson was overcome and his eyes put out when his religion went to sleep and he lay in the lap of Delilah. David committed his great crime when his religion was asleep, and when conscience awoke, that was his earnest prayer, that his religion might be restored to him: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." Although far from home and assailed by a terrible temptation, the religion of Joseph, the fear of God in his heart, was still awake, and it was that which saved him from the abyss, for he cried to his temptress, "How can I do this great evil and sin against God?"

Think, then, about the fate of Sisera, and beware where you turn in. Weigh carefully every smiling invitation. Consider not only present desire, but the long future. Heed not the voice of the flatterer with the lordly dish in her hand. Break those companionships and habits and pleasures which dull the edge of your moral perceptions and cast your conscience, your ambition, your honor, or your religion into a deep sleep.

Is conscience asleep? Is it as sensitive as it once was, or can you do things now which once would have troubled you without the slightest compunction of conscience? Is ambition asleep, or your honor? Are you thinking more of pleasure and ease and a good time in life, than duty and success and life's great goal? Is your religion asleep? Have you stopped praying? Have you stopped reading the Bible? Have you stopped observing the Lord's Day and worship in his church? If so, awake, and call upon God, ere the hammer and the tent pin of judgment are lifted over you. Make Christ a living reality. Look to him for counsel and help. Walk in his company, and wherever he goes, follow him.

XI

HEROD AND HERODIAS

FOR A WOMAN'S SAKE

For Herodias' sake. Mark 6: 17.
For their sakes, and them that sat at meat with him. Mark 6: 26.

A BRILLIANT and eccentric professor in the Theological Seminary used to tell the men in his classes never to marry a woman unless they were willing to go to hell for her sake. In the sense in which he meant it—a love which many waters cannot quench, and a devotion which laughs at death and hell—the advice was not unwholesome. But, in another sense, it is true that many a man has gone to hell for the sake of a woman; and also that many a woman has gone to hell for the sake of some man.

The moving pictures and the popular novels deal with what is termed "The Eternal Triangle." But, as a rule, it is not the eternal triangle, but the eternal quadrangle. Here in this story of Herod and Herodias we have the quadrangle. The three known angles are Herod Antipas, a weak, vicious prince, who inherited the vices but none of the greatness of his father, Herod the Great; his brother Philip, and Philip's wife, Herodias, the niece of both men. The unknown angle is the discarded wife of Herod Anti-

pas. On a visit to Rome, Herod became enamoured of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and carried her off with him to Syria. This union, at once adulterous and incestuous, must have shocked the Jewish sense of propriety and decency. But there was only one man in the realm who dared to rebuke Herod for his sin. It is easy to stand afar off and denounce the sins of high society. It is a more difficult and dangerous thing to do what John the Baptist did. Most men would rather be without their conscience than without their head; but John was a man who would rather be without his head than without his conscience. Standing before the guilty pair, John said to Herod: "It is not lawful for thee to have her. You have broken the law of God, and God will punish you." So far as Herod was concerned, the incident might have been passed over, for Herod had a secret admiration for John. But back of Herod was the sinister figure of Herodias. A good woman is the most wonderful thing in the universe, and a wicked woman the most terrible. Herodias hated John because he had rebuked her sins, and desired to kill him. Herod would not consent to the murder, but to please Herodias he shut up John in the prison. There in the lonely dungeon under the palace of Machærus, John's mighty spirit began to flag and his eagle eye began to film with doubt. It was from that prison that he sent his message of doubt to Jesus: "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?"

When Paul was in prison at Cæsarea, the wicked sensualist Felix sent frequently for him to hear him preach. Here we have Herod Antipas sending for John to have him preach to him, "for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and holy, and observed him, and when he heard him he did many things and heard him gladly." Herod saw the light of eternity circling about the brow of John. It is an instance of how there is a goodness which lies sleeping beneath the breast of the worst of men, and how even the worst of men respect and honor moral character. Herod, a weak voluptuary, impelled by passion and incited by his paramour, is nevertheless awed by a sense of right, and trembles at the whisper of conscience.

While Herod was listening to the sermons of John, and profiting from them too—for he "did many things," and, no doubt, amended some of his evil ways—Herodias, inspired by a vindictive hatred, was waiting for the hour of vengeance. The day chosen was Herod's birthday, when he made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee. This was a party "for men only." When it was well under way, and Herod and his guests were heated with wine, the crafty Herodias sent in her own daughter, Salome, a beautiful girl in the teens, to dance before the drunken revelers. As she reeled and turned in the dance with her filmy garments, she aroused the admiration and the passions of Herod and his nobles. Beside himself with delight, the king

cried out, "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom." Pleased at this, the damsel went out to her mother and said, "What shall I ask?" Like the hiss of a serpent came back the answer of Herodias, "The head of John the Baptist!"

Reclining on his couch in the banqueting hall, Herod was discussing with his nobles what his promise was likely to cost him? "I wonder what the damsel will ask? Perhaps a silk from Cashmere, or a diamond bracelet from the Caucasus, or it may be a gilded chariot with a white Arabian pair, or a villa on the shores of Tiberias." When Salome appeared before him, Herod asked her to name her request. Without a moment's hesitation the maid said, "The head of John the Baptist on a charger." At that all the wine and passion went out of Herod. The head of John! Who would have thought that Salome would have asked for that! No! Not the head of John the Baptist! He could never injure that just and holy man. "Herod was sorry." It was the last struggle of conscience within him. It was a final truce of God, inviting him to pause and consider ere he did the wicked thing. But as Herod hesitated, he looked about him and saw his lords and nobles were waiting for him to fulfill what he had promised. "Come, Herod, make good! Don't be a welcher! Keep your oath and fulfill what you have promised to the girl! Bring in the head of that John the Baptist! The country will be better off

without John anyway." Herod was sorry, exceedingly sorry. Yet, for the sake of them that sat at meat with him, just to please these drunken, vicious men, just to escape their ridicule, and to please Herodias, he gave the command, and in a few minutes, for the dungeon was just under the palace where they were drinking, the executioner came in with the head of John on a charger and gave the ghastly trophy to Salome, who hurried out to present it to her mother. Do you then sometimes wonder at the things which God permits to happen to you, or others? If so, remember what happened to John the Baptist, the one whom Christ said was the greatest man that ever lived; and there is his head on a silver charger, to please the whim of a half-naked dancing girl, and to satisfy the hatred and revenge of a wicked and vindictive adulteress. Yes, God lets some strange things happen in this world.

The end of John is a never-to-be-forgotten instance of how men often do wrong for the sake of others, or out of a false sense of honor. A fearful deed had been done by Herod; but not to further his interests, not to gratify his passions or his desires; but done against his desire and against conscience, just for the sake of those that sat at meat with him, to keep a foolish oath, and to please and satisfy a wicked woman.

If we could look into the origin of evil deeds, we should be surprised to discover how many evil deeds are done out of a false regard for the opinions of

others and out of a desire to please some one else. If the man had been left to himself, the thing would never have been done. Just as there is a vast amount of doing good for the sake of others, so there is a vast amount of vicarious wrongdoing.

This is true of the worst deeds, like that of Herod. For the sake of another, and sometimes for the sake of a wicked woman, a man will do an evil thing. "For her sake" this man stole; or, to gratify her vanity, falsified his accounts. A fool who perished in a leap from the Brooklyn Bridge told his friends before he took the fatal plunge that he was making the hazardous leap so that out of the money which would come to him, should he survive, his wife could be arrayed in the latest fashions. "For her sake" men have abandoned their homes and families and said farewell to character, principle, self-respect, and eternal hope.

The reverse, also, is true, and even sadder. "For *his* sake" women have gone to hell. Merely to please, to hold a slipping affection, to keep in good favor, they have consented to wicked things and done that which was naturally repugnant and abhorrent to them. Thus, "for his sake," innocence is tainted and conscience scarred.

Few, however, are tempted to these gross crimes. But in what we may think of as the more ordinary run of transgressions, this motive "for his sake," "for her sake," for the sake of them that sit at meat with us, plays a powerful part. If left to his own

desires and convictions and principles, the man would not have done these things. But he did it for the sake of another. To please others, to avoid the censure or ridicule of others, we sometimes swallow our principles and consent to evil. Here is one man whose principles are against drinking, or inviting others to drink; but for fear lest some one should think him unsocial or narrow, or puritanical, he abandons his convictions and follows the custom of those around him. Here is another who has the deepest regard for the doctrines and customs of the Christian faith, the Lord's Day, the Church, the ministry, the Bible, and the sacred things of Christian faith. But "just to avoid an argument," as men say, he keeps silent when these things are assailed, or joins in the flippant and unholy jest at that which inwardly he reveres, and gives signs of outward agreement to that which he really abominates.

"For the sake of a woman" spelled the downfall of Solomon. For the sake of his heathen wives he built altars to the heathen gods in Jerusalem. For the sake of outward appearance and holding his post as the prime minister of Syria, Naaman, who had been so wonderfully cured of his leprosy by the God of Israel, asked permission of Elisha to bow by the side of his master in the house of Rimmon.

Everywhere we are confronted by the tragic story of evil done just for the sake of those who sit at meat with us. Abraham Lincoln was a man of easy

access, anecdotal and friendly. Yet there was one incident in his career to which he never permitted anyone to refer, and of which he was thoroughly ashamed, and that was his almost duel with Shields on an island in the Mississippi River. On the roadway which traverses the highlands between Weehawken and Hoboken, overlooking the Hudson River and the sky-reaching temples of mammon in New York, one can see a low stone monument on which are these words: "Here on July 11, 1804, Alexander Hamilton fell in a duel with Aaron Burr." When Burr challenged Hamilton to fight the duel, the first inclination of Hamilton was to refuse, for dueling was abhorrent to him as a man and as a Christian. But lest the refusal to fight should injure his future usefulness, just for the sake of pleasing a depraved public opinion, Hamilton accepted the challenge, and on the very spot where his son had fallen a year before, met his tragic and lamented end."

"Just for the sake of them that sat with him
At meat, King Herod kept his sinful oath,
And slew the Baptist, though his heart was loath
To crown his record with a crime so grim.
We live in fuller day; his light was dim;
Yet oftentimes we make high heaven wroth
By deeds which stay our soul's eternal growth.
To satisfy some senseless social whim,

We laugh with flippant scorn at what full well
We know we should adore on bended knees;
We trample our ideals 'neath our feet;

And this for no great cause approved of hell,
Which devils might applaud; but just to please
The whims of them that sit with us at meat." [1]

Now we turn to the other and more pleasant side of the subject. If for the sake of others evil is done, it is beautifully true that for the sake of others noble deeds are done. If the worst thing that could happen to a young man is to do evil and to be drawn into wrong paths for the sake of a woman, so also the best thing that could happen to a young man is to be inspired to do good for the sake of a good woman. On the third day of the battle of Gettysburg, when the Union artillery had ceased firing, creating the mistaken impression among the Confederates that the Union guns had been silenced, the Confederate chief of artillery, Alexander, sent word to Longstreet, who commanded the corps from which Pickett's division was taken for the famous charge. As soon as this message was received, Pickett sprang to his feet, and, looking toward Longstreet, said, "General, shall I go forward?" Unable to speak the order which he was convinced must end in disaster, Longstreet grasped Pickett by the hand and bowed his head. The next moment Pickett was on his horse and off at a gallop. In a few minutes he came riding back to Longstreet and handed him a letter addressed to his fiancée at Richmond. On the back of the envelope he had written in pencil, "If Old Peter's (Long-

[1] Fowler.

street's sobriquet) nod means death, good-by, and God bless you, little one." As he went to the head of his lines again, Wilcox, another of the commanders, rode up to him and, taking a flask from his pocket, said: "Pickett, take a drink with me. In an hour, you will be in hell or glory." Pickett refused to drink, saying: "I promised the little girl who is waiting and praying for me down in Virginia that I would keep fresh upon my lips, until we should meet again, the breath of the violets she gave me when we parted. Whatever my fate, Wilcox, I shall try to do my duty like a man, and I hope that, by that little girl's prayer, I shall to-day reach glory or glory." Thus "for her sake," without the smell of whisky upon him, Pickett rode to glory.

Who can tell how much evil has been refrained from and how much good has been done for the love of a noble woman, for the sake of a good man, or a little child. Here is a man just about to sign his name to a pact of evil and sell his birthright for a mess of pottage. But, as he is about to do so, he catches a glimpse of the face of a godly father or mother. For their sakes he draws back. Here is a woman about to slip over the precipice of sin into the gulf of guilt. But at the last moment she sees the face of a little child, and for the child's sake she utters the Everlasting No.

When David after all his trials and persecutions at length became king of Israel, the first thing he

said was this: "Is there any left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for the sake of Jonathan?" For the sake of that old friend, who had loved him so dearly and helped him in his dangers, David was ready to forgive his enemies of Saul's house. Even David's greater Son was actuated by this great motive, the consideration of others. "For their sakes," he said in his final prayer for the disciples, "I sanctify myself." Christ thought of the needs and temptations of Peter and James and John, and all who in the ages to come should through them believe on his name, and of you and me in this church to-night, and for their sake, for our sake, sanctified himself and kept himself from evil. Yes, even Almighty God himself acts according to this principle and is moved by this consideration. When we pray to him we conclude our petitions by saying, "For Christ's sake." However often that phrase falls from our lips, let us never forget the wonder and the glory of it, that God for the sake of Christ is willing to loose and set in motion all the powers and agencies of redemption.

Thus, wherever we start or wherever we go, here always we will try to end, here at the Cross of Christ. That Cross always will be our hope and our glory. No matter what evil we have done for ourselves, or for the sake of others, God, for Christ's sake, is willing to forgive and pardon. Now, O God, for the sake of Christ, thine only begotten Son who died for

us, hear our prayer and make us the beneficiaries of thy redeeming love. For Christ's sake lift us up and hold us up. For his sake wash away the stain of our sins. For his sake forgive our sins, and for his sake bring us faultless into thy presence.

XII

JESUS AND THE WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER

WOMANHOOD REDEEMED

Behold a woman which was a sinner. Luke 7: 37.

Among the multitude of altars reared at Athens, there was an Altar to Tears. On this altar no sacrifices were offered. It was a dim prediction of the truth that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. Here, in this wonderful story from St. Luke's Gospel, we bow before an Altar of Tears. Repentance is the true prelude and gateway to the glorious temple of our faith.

Some of the most wonderful stories in the Bible we owe to St. Luke. The greatest and most moving scenes in the New Testament are those of repentance, a sinner returning to God. There are four great recitals of repentance in the Gospels: the Prodigal Son, Peter, the Thief on the Cross, and the Woman Who Was a Sinner. Of these four, three are related in Luke's Gospel only; and the most moving story of the repentance of Peter comes from the same Gospel.

Simon the Pharisee was one of the chief men in the town. Everybody was glad to know him and felt honored by an invitation to sit at his table. He

was a man of high standing and reputation, too. No cloud of reproach had settled over him or his house. Confident in himself, he could say, like the other Pharisee, "I fast twice every week, and give tithes of all that I possess." Why did he invite Jesus? Perhaps just out of curiosity; perhaps out of that miserable trait in human nature which makes men desire to be in the companionship of some notable person; and for the time being, at least, Christ was a notable person. But whatever his motive, Christ, who ate with publicans and sinners, accepted his invitation and went to the banquet.

At the banquet Simon disclosed his true nature. The ordinary courtesies, the kiss of salutation, water for the feet, and oil for the head were omitted. There may have been a touch of sarcasm in this omission, as if he would say to Jesus, "You have criticized us Pharisees for cleansing our hands before we eat, but not our hearts. So I am sure you will not be offended if we omit water on this occasion." Or, he may have regarded Jesus as just an ignorant carpenter's son, who didn't know what was expected in the way of social amenities, and in whose case these courtesies could be omitted without offense. We do not like to think that Simon went deliberately out of his way to humiliate a poor and humble man. If so, he was detestable beyond the power of definition. Poor and simple men who went to call on Lincoln would relate how he was able to make them feel at home in his presence, and it was

said of Walter Scott that he treated all men as if they were blood relations.

The guests are seated, and the servants begin to bring in the food and the drink. Silent as to the omissions of the usual courtesies, Christ is nevertheless conscious of it. Now enters the woman who was a sinner. This phrase seems to have implied, not sinner in the general sense, but in a specific sense, unchastity. Christian art and tradition have identified her with Mary of Magdala, out of whom Christ cast seven devils. There is no ground for this identification, but, in fact, good reasons against it; for the very fact of demoniac possession would have made it impossible for a woman to ply the trade of a harlot. Others have sought to identify the woman with Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who also washed the feet of Christ and wiped his feet with her hair. But it is disagreeable to think that the Mary of that quiet home was a harlot; and, but for the coincidence of a similar name, Simon, there is nothing to uphold the identification. So this woman goes down in history nameless, and yet forever named; "unknown, and yet well known."

Where had this woman heard of Jesus? Perhaps she had been near Nain when he raised the widow's son, or, standing on the fringe of a crowd, had heard him say that he had come to call sinners to repentance, or perhaps she had heard those other blessed words, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest"; or it may have been just the tone of his voice,

or the light of his face that had interested, arrested, and fascinated this woman of shady reputation, and who was of the oldest trade in the world. Thomas Arnold of Rugby in one of his sermons expresses the conviction that no church service is ever held without some one who is there being impressed. It is encouraging for a minister to believe that that is so; and certainly every earnest worshiper in the church ought always to pray that it will be so. Where many have gone away indifferent, unmoved, critical, or hostile, there was one to whom the Spirit was speaking. Perhaps this harlot was that one, and the only one, impressed and reached by a sermon of Jesus.

When she heard that Jesus was in town, and that the rich man Simon was holding a banquet for him at his great house, she determined to go and see Jesus and pay him a tribute of her love. There is always the possibility in this matchless tale that the woman had had a private meeting with Jesus previous to this, and that he had awakened the true woman within her breast, and pointed her the way to forgiveness and God. Rosetti, in his painting and in his poem, describes the woman going up the steps of Simon's house and forsaking a band of revelers on the street. She is followed up the steps by her lover, who seeks to hold her back, but she has seen the Bridegroom's face and must go in.

"Why wilt thou cast the roses from thine hair?
Nay, be thou all a rose—wreath, lips, and cheek.

Nay, not this house—that banquet-house we seek;
See how they kiss and enter; come thou there.
This delicate day of love we two will share
Till at our ear love's whispering night shall speak.
What, sweet one, hold'st thou still the foolish freak?
Nay, when I kiss thy feet they'll leave the stair."

"O, loose me! Seest thou not my Bridegroom's face
That draws me to Him? For His feet my kiss,
My hair, my tears He craves to-day: and O!
What words can tell what other day and place
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His?
He needs me, calls me, loves me: let me go!"

Anatole France, in "The Procurator of Judæa," makes Mary of Magdala a harlot and a paramour of Laelius Lamia, and when Pilate and Lamia meet together, Lamia tells him of this Jewess whom he had once seen dancing and how he fell in love with her voice, the atmosphere of her incense, and the semisomnolescent state in which she seemed to live. But one day she disappeared, and he saw her no more. Months afterwards he learned by chance that she had attached herself to a small company of men and women who were followers of a young Galilean thaumaturgist, whose name was Jesus, and who was crucified for some crime. When Lamia said to Pilate, "Pontius, do you remember anything about the man?" Pilate contracted his brows, and with his hand to his forehead, as if to probe the deeps of memory, said: "Jesus? Jesus of Nazareth? I cannot call him to mind."

But whoever this woman was, and however she

came, whether quietly and alone, or against the entreaties of companions and lovers, she came to the feast with a great enterprise of love and adoration in her mind. It was easier then to gain access to a great supper than it is to-day. To-day the woman would never have got by the doorkeeper or the butler. But this woman had no difficulty in finding her way into the banqueting room and taking a place where the feet of Jesus as he lay on the couch at the supper were within her reach. She had brought with her an alabaster box of ointment. From the story of the other anointing by Mary at Bethany, we know that this ointment must have been very expensive, worth at least three hundred pence. If this represented the wages of her sin, never was better use made of tainted money. But more precious than the ointment in the alabaster box was the ointment of the woman's tears. In the beautiful language of St. Luke, "She stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head." In those tears were the mingled condiments of womanly shame, contrition, and yet gratitude and devotion. Never before or since were a man's feet so washed. George Macdonald in "Robert Falconer" tells of how the evangelist was reading this story to a group in which there was a young woman who had been a sinner. When he was through, she asked if it was true that He was coming again, as she had heard. When asked why she asked such a question, she said,

after a little hesitation, "Because I'm afraid my hair won't be long enough to wipe his feet."

The beautiful tresses of that hair, once used as a net to entrap her victims, now wipe the feet of the Son of Man, her new found, but now Eternal Lover. What a sight is this for the angels in heaven! Then she covers his feet with her kisses, kisses once wasted on the faces of lewd lovers and purchased with money, but now imprinted upon the Saviour's feet, and never forgotten by that Saviour, even when they drove the cruel nails through his feet on Calvary's tree. After the kisses came the sweet-smelling ointment. Once she had spent ointment like this on her own person to make her body a more subtle and potent agent of the devil. But now she pours it out over the Body which was to be broken for sinners.

All this Simon had observed with an increasing amazement. Yet he observed outward civility and said nothing. But what he was thinking to himself was this: "I don't pretend to be a prophet and a teacher of God, and yet I would never permit a woman of the street to come near me, let alone to kiss my feet and wipe them with the hair of her head." "If this man were a prophet!" How Christ has changed since then the world's idea of a prophet and the preacher and the man of God! What, then, to a man like Simon would be proof that he was no preacher, is now the evidence for his calling and his office, for the Son of Man, and every true follower

of the Son of Man, must come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Simon had said nothing that anyone could hear; but Jesus, reading his thoughts, what he was saying within himself, answered him. How solemn and arresting is this reflection, that Christ hears what we say and think within our hearts! What we would not dare utter in words, or speak to the most intimate friend, but say only in the chambers of imagery, Christ hears and observes.

Jesus, answering, said unto to his host, "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." Perhaps this was the first word that Christ had uttered at the feast. Simon, putting his hand to the dish for another helping, or quaffing another glass of wine, answered: "Say on! Go ahead! Let us hear what you have to say!" In the parable which followed, the method of Jesus was like that of Nathan with David, to tell a story, and then get an expression upon it which would be a word of self-condemnation. To this end Jesus said: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." Then Jesus said to Simon, "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" Simon had no difficulty in estimating that the one who had been forgiven a sum ten times as much as the other would love the most. "I suppose," said Simon, with a supercilious and indifferent tone, "that he to whom

he forgave most." Then the answer of Jesus rang through the banqueting hall, "Thou hast rightly judged!"

> And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gaveth me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

The parable which Jesus repeats—or perhaps it was an incident from real life—does not teach that the debtor is forgiven because he loves his creditor, but that his love for the creditor comes after his forgiveness. "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." This means that our appreciation of Christ and our love for him will be in exact proportion to our sense of need and our sense of sin. Christianity is a gospel for sinners. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and only those who know and confess themselves lost sinners have any right to pass judgment on it. The key to Christian theology is contrition and self-despair. The question, Are there those who have little to be forgiven? answers itself. The greatest saints, like St. Paul, who called himself the chief of sinners, and St. Augustine, and Copernicus, who asked only for the mercy

which Christ gave to the dying thief, have been the ones who humbled themselves before the holiness of God and who were always ready to pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

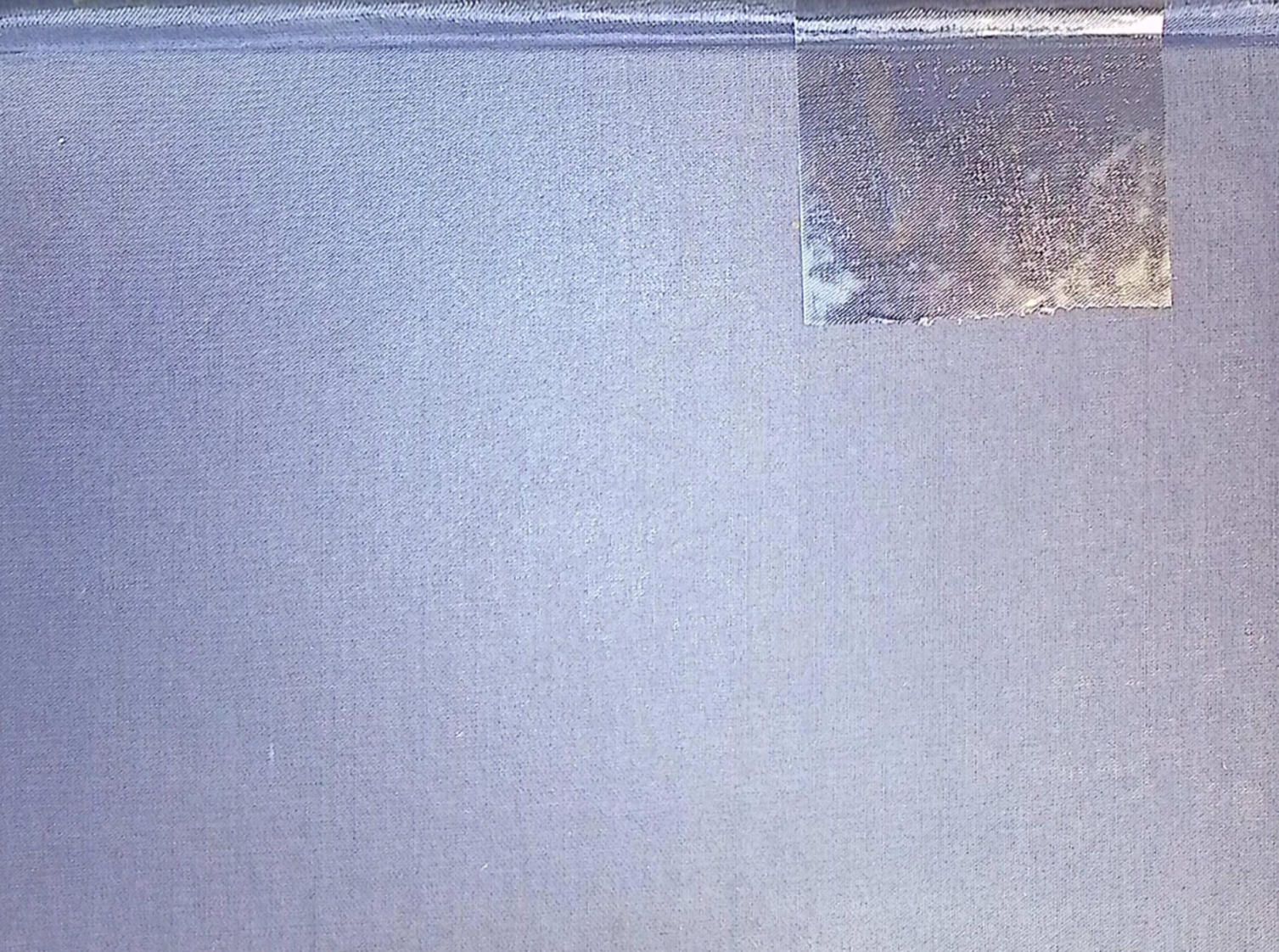
In this parable of the two debtors the thing emphasized is not the difference in the debt, for neither one could pay what he owed, but the difference in the attitude of Simon and this woman toward Christ. The woman knew that she was a sinner. Simon was sure as to that, too, but not as to himself. That difference in feeling resulted in a different attitude toward Jesus: the cold, formal hospitality of Simon and the warm and sacrificial love of the woman.

These two types still persist and represent different attitudes toward self and God and sin. There is the type of Simon, the man who has little sense of his need, and a correspondingly little amount of faith and love. Those who first saw and heard Christ with indifference are of the same class as those who do so now; whereas the same kind of persons who saw and heard him with love, do so to-day. The woman is a type of those who see their need. All through the New Testament we see that strange and mysterious difference in men's hearts. In the very last act of Christ's life, he hung between two men, a thief who mocked at him and a thief who repented. The Kingdom of Christ is founded upon those who repent. It is a society and commonwealth of the forgiven.

At the last Christ said to the woman; "Go in

peace. Thy faith hath saved thee." When he said, "Her sins which are many are forgiven because she loved much," he did not mean that her love was the ground and *cause* of her forgiveness, but the *result* of her forgiveness. Christ smote the rock of her heart, and abundant streams of love burst forth. We are told to work out our salvation, but never to work out our faith. That God alone can do for us. To love Christ in the highest sense of the word—that is, to love him because he first loved us—is to worship him as our Saviour from sin. Who is your Christ? Just the great leader and teacher? Or is he the One who has redeemed you from sin? What you think of Christ depends altogether upon your answer to this. Thomas Jefferson, near the end of his life, wrote, "I am a Christian in the only sense in which he wished any one to be—sincerely attached to his doctrines in preference to all others." But this is not the kind of Christian that the woman who was a sinner became, or that Paul became, or that the thief on the cross became. These, and thousands after them, loved Christ because he had forgiven their sins.

Jesus said to the woman, "Go in peace." Does he send her back into the world amid all its temptations and perils and away from Christ? Yes, he tells her to go back into the world, and yet in safety and in peace. Go back to the streets you once walked in search of your prey; back to the shaded groves of your secret rendezvous; back to your revelers and lovers, for now you are safe. The mark of the Lamb

of God is upon you. You have found the greatest Lover of them all.

As she goes out from the banqueting hall, the silence which has hung over the feast after the words of Jesus is broken by strains of haunting melody. It is not the orchestra of Simon with their flutes and cymbals, nor is it the strolling musicans of the street, nor does it come out of the window of some house of marriage or of revelry. What music can it be? Whence comes it? Is it the music which bids farewell to some messenger of heaven as he goes forth upon his great enterprise? Is it the song of triumph over the tidings which have come of a rebellion put down in some part of God's empire? Is it the song which hails a new creation, or the advent of a new world in God's vast empire? Are the morning stars singing together? Are the suns of God shouting for joy? No. It is not that music, but something richer, deeper, more majestic. It is a music in which all the minor chords of human guilt and shame and sorrow and suffering and pain, transmuted by the sighs and agony and tears and blood of the Son of God, have been lifted into the major chord of thanksgiving and praise and rejoicing. It is heaven's noblest music, the song of the angels rejoicing over one sinner that repenteth. It is the music of ten thousand times ten thousand rejoicing over the repentance of one poor harlot, once a sinner, but now washed white in the blood of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.